

**Organizational Identity-Power in Practice:
The Rhetorics of University Identity**

Matthew R. Sharp

**Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy
in
Rhetoric & Writing**

**Carolyn D. Rude, Committee Chair
Kelly R. Belanger
Carlos Evia Puerto
Kelly E. Pender**

**May 2, 2013
Blacksburg, Virginia**

**Keywords: rhetoric, organizational identity, branding,
professional communication, power**

**©2013
Matthew R. Sharp**

**Organizational Identity-Power in Practice:
The Rhetorics of University Identity**

Matthew R. Sharp

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how various versions of a university's identity—including the leadership-sponsored brand as well as alternate rhetorics of organizational identity—shape the policies and practices of the university itself through the lenses of rhetoric and power. While the concept of organizational identity has been studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including marketing, organizational communication, graphic design, and organizational behavior, they all seem to have a common goal: maintaining the status-quo of management's control over all perceptions of the organization's identity. Most organizations however, do not have a single monolithic identity, especially large, decentralized organizations like universities. Alternate rhetorics of identity exist, but these management-centered approaches do not allow for their role in shaping organizational identity or practice. The rhetorically-grounded approach that guides this dissertation, however, which is based on identity-formation through identification as well as the role of rhetoric as a method of determining the most appropriate and effective ways of moving people to action, acknowledges the role of these alternate identity-rhetorics in organizational life and recognizes their potential impact on organizational activity.

Through three cases of organizational decision making and policy creation at Virginia Tech, this dissertation explores the ways that the various rhetorics of identity within the university (including the official, leadership-sponsored brand and other versions of organizational identity held by university members) contradict, reflect, and co-construct each other and organizational practice. Through ethnographic interviews with members of the Virginia Tech community, participant-observation of a brand training program, and analysis of

various visual, verbal, and multimodal texts related to each case study, this project explores these many rhetorics of organizational identity as they struggle for the power to shape the institution. This dissertation encourages researchers, teachers, and practitioners of professional and technical communication to recognize alternative organizational identity-rhetorics because of their potential power to shape the organization. Specifically within educational institutions, this project suggests that branding initiatives be critiqued as potentially hegemonic forces that repress these alternative identity perspectives, which may provide necessary incentives or conduits for organizational growth.

Acknowledgements

While it's nice to think that I did this all on my own, I haven't. I know that the process would not have been as smooth, as successful, or as rewarding without the support of quite a few people.

First, I would like to thank my committee. Carolyn, I am honored to have been your student. I am convinced that your thoughtful engagement with my work is what made the difference in this project. Our conversations never cease to reveal new perspectives and deeper insights than what I would have found on my own. Carlos, my friend and mentor, you have helped me develop as a teacher and a scholar in innumerable ways. Specific to this dissertation, though, thank you for your continual encouragement and just letting me sit in your office and babble all too often when I needed it. And, to Kelly B. and Kelly P., thank you for helping me work through some very difficult ideas. My conversations with each of you were invaluable as I continued to refine my approach.

Next, I thank my family. I am blessed to have a plethora of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews, and other relations standing behind me. Your support means the world to me, and it is one of the things that kept me pushing toward this goal over the last few years.

And to my parents (all four of you) and my siblings, you never doubted me. You will never know how much that means to me. Thank you for supporting this wild adventure I decided to embark upon four years ago. I could not have done it without you. I love you all.

Specifically, I have to thank my mom. I would not be here (with a Ph.D.!) without you. For as long as I can remember, it was you and me against the world. You always told me I was smart. I wasn't so sure, but you never stopped believing in me or expecting me to do my best. Then, when it finally sunk in, you celebrated my academic victories, but you taught me the importance of humility. Looks like you knew what you were doing after all. I love you.

T.J. and Robin, my other family, thank you for putting up with all the late-night calls somehow filled with both insufferable hubris and depressing doubt. You are my escape, and wherever you are feels like home. I only wish I could have escaped more often. Love you, mean it.

To my Blacksburg friends—Megan, Molly, Mike, Ashley, Mandy, Andy, Scott, Libby, Heidi, and Eva—you may or may not technically be a part of the RW “cohort”, but you are my cohort. We went through this together, and it wouldn't have been the same without you.

Finally, two of those friends deserve a special thank you. I honestly don't think I would have made it without them. Megan, you showed me that success is possible, and you kind of required me to believe it. I can only hope that you're as proud of me as I am of you. Molly, you were my first friend in the program, and we've stuck together ever since, through each stage of the process. I could not have asked for a better companion for the journey. Now, we're both off to Florida, and I can't wait to see what comes next.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Branding the University	1
Branding the University	2
Branding and Organizational Identity across Disciplines.....	7
Research Site and Questions	15
Conclusion.....	18
Chapter 2 – Identity-Rhetorics and Identity-Power: A Theoretical Frame.....	20
Rhetoric, Identification, and Organizational Practice.....	22
Enacting Organizational Identity-Rhetorics	25
Rhetorical Enactment of Identity-Rhetorics	29
A Theory of Identity-Power	32
Conclusion.....	38
Chapter 3 – Research Site and Methods	40
Research Site.....	41
Research Methods	44
Case Selection	45
Key Informants.....	47
Brand Ambassador Program Participant-Observation	47
Interviews with University Members.....	50
Case Study Texts	53
Data Analysis.....	55
Chapter 4 – Planning Virginia Tech’s Future.....	58
Strategic Planning in Higher Education	59
Strategic Planning at Virginia Tech	64
The Brand as Structural Resource.....	67
A Research University	68
The Brand Promise.....	72
The Brand as Aspirational Identity-Rhetoric.....	75
Diversity and Cultural Inclusion	77
Technological Leadership.....	80
Interdisciplinarity	83
Contradicting Identity-Rhetorics	87
Conclusion.....	91

Chapter 5 – Saving Stadium Woods.....	94
Background of the Case	95
The Decision.....	98
The Identity-Power of Opposition	99
Land-Grant Rhetorics	100
Hokie Rhetorics	105
Sustainability Rhetorics.....	109
Democratic Rhetorics.....	113
Reputation Rhetorics	116
The Agency to Deploy Identity-Power	120
Conclusion.....	126
Chapter 6 – The Evolution of the Brand	127
The (Re)Production of a Brand	129
“I invent” Campaign	132
Impact and Outreach Identity-Rhetorics	134
Distancing from the Athletic Identity.....	138
Evolution of the Brand	143
“Community” Identity-Rhetorics after April 16	144
Conclusion.....	150
Chapter 7 – Conclusions	152
Powerful Identity-Rhetorics.....	155
Identity-Power, Reified	158
The Brand as a Hegemonic Force	161
Implications for Theory.....	163
Implications for Practice	164
Implications for Pedagogy	165
Limitations of this Study	166
Suggestions for Future Research	169
Conclusion.....	170
Works Cited.....	172
Appendix A – Links to Artifacts	185
Appendix B – Interview Protocol	186
Appendix C – Coding Scheme	188

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	The cycle of identity and activity production and reproduction.	32
Figure 2.2	The cycle of identity-power, identity, and activity.	37
Figure 3.1	The Virginia Tech Brand Platform provides a textual explanation of the message intended to be communicated through the branding process (VT, “Brand”). Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	41
Figure 5.1	Sign from the tree-naming rally.	103
Figure 5.2	Sign from the tree-naming rally.	107
Figure 5.3	The visual representation of patriotism dominated the tree-naming rally.	115
Figure 6.1	This business card slide often accompanies the retelling of Hincker’s story. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	130
Figure 6.2	The “I invent” logo. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	132
Figure 6.3	One of the “impact” campaign’s advertisements, which focuses on Virginia Tech’s economic development role in the medical industry. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	135
Figure 6.4	The slanted VT athletics logo. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	139
Figure 6.5	The HokieBird. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	139
Figure 6.6	The university wordmark. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	141
Figure 6.7	Photographs in admission advertisements in the years following the events of April 16 show students interacting with each other and with faculty in order to communicate the identity-rhetoric of community. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.	147

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Data obtained from Brand Ambassador Program courses. 49

Table 3.2 Interview participants. 51

Chapter 1

Introduction: Branding the University

“Thus, in America, it is natural for a man to identify himself with the business corporation he serves.” – Kenneth Burke (*Attitudes* 264)

Broadly considered, the purpose of a branding effort is to encourage and persuade organizational stakeholders to identify in some way with a corporation or its products. These corporate brands present the values and characteristics with which an organization wants to be associated. A brand is a proposition (or collection of propositions) that “underpins organisational efforts to communicate, differentiate, and enhance” itself and its services in the minds of its stakeholders (Balmer 281). These stakeholders include customers, investors, competitors, the media, and employees, to name just a few (Melewar and Akel 42). For corporations, the end goal of a brand and the identification process is, of course, profit. Many other types of organizations, however, are also beginning to adopt the practices of branding in an effort to accomplish their own goals. The question is whether colleges and universities should follow their lead. And if so, what does that mean for colleges and universities? How does a central, management-controlled brand affect the multiple layers of diverse voices that make colleges and universities unique and vital organizations?

Recent events, such as the 2012 ouster and reinstatement of the University of Virginia president and the 2012 crisis in athletics at The Pennsylvania State University, raise questions about how dominant, monolithic identities can become so powerful that alternative voices are

ignored or rejected, leading to questionable or unethical university policies and decisions. In this dissertation, I address some of these concerns by exploring the power relations involved in the struggle between a university's official management-sponsored brand and other perceptions of the university's identity held by its faculty, staff, and students. I investigate the ways in which all of these perceptions of university identity rhetorically shape the policies and practices of the organization itself. And, I determine, within three specific cases, how members of the university community, including students, faculty, and staff, use various texts and discourses to work within those power structures and gain the agency to make a difference in university decisions.

In this introductory chapter, I first discuss the phenomenon of university branding. Then, I explore the ways organizational identity has been studied across a number of social science disciplines in order to demonstrate the limitations of their management-centered approach to branding and organizational identity. These limitations lead into my research questions for this dissertation about organizational identity, organizational practice, and power, as well as a brief discussion of my research site, Virginia Tech. Finally, I end the chapter with brief overviews of each of the following chapters and how they fit together to address my larger concerns about the power relations involved in the creation of university identity.

Branding the University

The branding of academic institutions has become an undeniably common practice, and for good reason. University brands are useful because they serve purposes similar to those of corporations. They act to differentiate institutions of higher education from their competitors

and communicate that differentiation to stakeholders in order to enhance the organization's position in stakeholders' minds and the marketplace. That enhanced position has become a necessary step toward a university's survival because it can contribute to a number of organizational advancements, including recruiting more students, attracting better faculty, and obtaining more public and private funding (Zemsky, Shaman, and Shapiro 2).

This phenomenon of university branding, however, has taken quite a while to become accepted into the institutional culture of higher education. Over the past three or four decades, universities have gradually adopted more business-like practices and vocabularies when it comes to promotional, fundraising, and communication practices (Carlson 25-26). In the foreword to a 1981 research report on Marketing in Higher Education, ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education Director Jonathan D. Fife claims that "most institutions, except perhaps the very elite, cannot remain passive in their efforts to attract new students and still maintain enrollments" (i). In order to take a more active role in such efforts, universities and their many units now engage in a variety of business-like practices such as marketing, advertising, media relations, and the production of collateral materials like brochures, websites, and direct mail pieces—all aimed at specific audiences with specific purposes. And, as these practices continue to become more prevalent, university leadership increasingly wants all of these messages and artifacts to be permeated by a consistent and unified university brand, including taglines, logos, and key words and phrases that reflect the organization's desired identity.

The trend of university branding, particularly in the United States, is partly due to ever-increasing competition in the higher education sector, which can be traced to a number of factors, including decreased funding, the rise of for-profit colleges, and increases in community

college enrollment. Some even claim that this competitive atmosphere began in 1970 when the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education created its first classification system of colleges and universities in the United States (Alessandri, Yang, and Kinsey 258). Others, however, believe it has more to do with ranking systems published in popular news outlets such as the *U.S. News and World Report* annual “Best Colleges” guide, first published in 1983 (Carlson 38). Regardless of the cause, there has been an undeniable shift in the way traditional, four-year universities approach their publicity and communication practices. Simply put, competition requires differentiation, and colleges and universities are daily engaging in these very rhetorical, positioning activities in an effort to control the perceptions and discourses surrounding their organizations and differentiate themselves from their competition.

While some research has been done on aspects of the university branding phenomenon—how branding initiatives affect prospective students’ perceptions (Bennett and Ali-Choudhury), the effects of university website images (Ramasubramanian, Gyure, and Mursi), and the relationship between university brand and philanthropic practices (Atakan and Eker), for instance—most of this work approaches the topic from a very management-centric perspective, the goal of which is the successful implementation, adoption, and deployment of the organization’s brand as it is seen or constructed by university leadership¹. This management-centered outlook seems to overlook the complexity and decentralized nature of most universities as organizations and the resulting multitude of perspectives related to organizational identity that inevitably will exist within them. Some studies even concentrate on

¹ See Alessandri, Yang, and Kinsey; Baker and Balmer; Humphreys and Brown; and Melewar and Akel for more examples of studies on university identity and branding.

weakening those alternative identity perspectives in favor of the identity or brand that is sponsored, constructed, and approved by the organization's leadership.

Furthermore, most of the work done on university branding so far makes the assumption that branding a university is equivalent to branding a corporation. In fact, some explicitly argue that a commercial firm and a university are almost completely similar. These arguments emphasize the fact that both universities and corporations make decisions for economic reasons. They both have a primary goal of survival. And, they both accomplish this goal through an organization of people that must navigate internal and external environments (Doyle and Newbould 22-24). Norman Fairclough calls this the commodification of education: "the process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to be organized and conceptualized in terms of commodity production, distribution, and consumption" (Fairclough, *Discourse* 207). There are, however, significant differences between universities and corporations that cannot be ignored. Primarily, corporations are much more profit-driven than most colleges and universities (Doyle and Newbould 24). There is some overlap, but the parallels between a commercial business selling a product or service and a university recruiting students or raising funds are relatively loose because the related values and missions are somewhat incompatible.

With that said, most universities do have a dual identity that includes a corporate aspect. Modern research universities in the United States, in particular, necessarily have both a normative identity and a utilitarian identity. The normative identity reflects the origins of the medieval university within the church and its noble ethical and educational missions, while the

utilitarian identity reflects the necessity of administrative and business functions (Albert and Whetten 105). The two identities coexist, but often conflict with each other when it is time to make a decision. Sometimes the normative identity prevails and decisions are made based on educational values, but sometimes the utilitarian identity prevails and decisions are made based on business-like, financially-driven values. Even though this utilitarian identity is undeniably a part of the modern research university, it is still only a part. The normative identity remains; therefore, it stands to reason that the most effective and appropriate method of branding (or studying the branding of) a corporation, which is expected to rely largely upon a utilitarian identity, may not be the most effective or the most appropriate method for branding (or studying the branding of) a university. I argue that the top-down approach, which values an official, management-sponsored identity, ignores the inherent multi-vocal aspect of an educational institution's normative identity.

Yet, many universities seem to try to follow the corporate method in their branding efforts. In the process, what do we lose? What is being overlooked or left behind? Brenton Faber argues that "the colonization of academic space by market discourse has had very tangible consequences on the design of curriculum, the relations between faculty members and students, the significance of revenue generation activities, and the role of research within academic sites" (Faber, "Creating" 397). But what else? I am led to wonder what types of consequences the adoption of branding discourse within the academy has had. Specifically, I wonder how this management-centered approach to branding affects other versions of an organization's identity and the people who identify with those alternate identities. Are the

university's faculty, staff, and students losing the power to define themselves and the organization in this move toward a consistent, monolithic identity?

This dissertation contributes to the study of branding and university identity by examining it from a perspective that takes the unique position of the university into account. I see university identity as a concept that is co-constructed by the history, texts, actions, and members of the organization. I study the various rhetorics involved in that construction of university identity, including the leadership-sponsored brand as well as alternative identity perspectives, and see how those rhetorics inform each other as well as how they affect the course of the university itself—its policies and practices. Through this variety of perspectives, I am able to locate the power relations involved in the ways the official/dominant rhetorics of identity and the unofficial/alternative rhetorics of identity shape a particular university at a particular time. In other words, I can determine which identity-rhetorics have the power to shape the policies and practices of one large research university and how that power is reified by members of the university community in each case.

Branding and Organizational Identity across Disciplines

The study of branding and organizational identity is an interdisciplinary effort. The fields of marketing, organizational communication, graphic design, organizational behavior, and rhetoric and professional communication have all researched the nature of brands and organizational identity in general, including their practical and theoretical aspects: how organizations develop and manage brands, why they are important aspects of an organization's strategic communication plan, and their effectiveness in messages directed at both internal and

external stakeholders. Each of these fields studying the concepts of branding and organizational identity does so from unique disciplinary perspectives. In general, studies from the field of marketing look at these concepts from the perspective of the organization's external audiences and how their perceptions of an organization's brand affect their decisions (Hatch and Schultz 357; see also Bennett and Ali-Choudhury). Organizational communication, on the other hand, tends to look at identity from the perspective of internal members of the organization, often looking at how employees identify with the official identity adopted by management (Hatch and Schultz 357; see also Ashforth and Mael; Humphreys and Brown; Larson and Pepper; Ricketta). Studies from that perspective see organizational identity as "a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics" (Hatch and Schultz 357). Design-related studies concentrate largely on an organization's visual identity, including their use of colors, logos, and taglines (Hatch and Schultz 358; see also Alessandri, Yang, and Kinsey; Baker and Balmer; Melewar, Saunders, and Balmer). What these three approaches have in common is that they barely acknowledge alternative perspectives of identity, and when they do, they seem more interested in overcoming those alternative identities than incorporating them into the identity discourse of the organization.² They are top-down approaches that are more concerned with maintaining the status-quo of management's control over all perceptions of the organization's identity.

My own previous experience, however, leads me to believe that these alternative perspectives continue to exist, even in the face of management's attempts at control. As a

² See O'Neil for one example of a marketing-related study that focuses on the perspective of individual communicators and their own perspectives of organizational identity. She still is less concerned with incorporating those alternative perceptions into the management-sponsored identity, however, than she is with exposing their origins.

former university communicator, I recognize this as a rhetorical problem. For six years, I was in an enrollment management position, responsible for communicating the university's identity to major audiences—prospective students and their parents. From this perspective, I understand the push for a unified, organizational brand. As a recruiter, I needed to represent the university in ways similar to my colleagues in admissions, recruitment, and university relations. However, I also experienced a number of tensions in which my own impressions of the university's identity occasionally conflicted with the unified identity that I was responsible for communicating. As a result, I had to make a rhetorical choice based on my assessment of each situation. Which version of identity do I present? Most often, I presented the official version; after all, that was my job. My own experience is telling, however. No matter how much management tries to encourage or enforce consistency, the reality seems to be that members of an organization, especially those in different units and at different levels across large, decentralized organizations like universities, often have very different perspectives on organizational identity.

Research on organizational identity within the organizational behavior and psychology literature seems somewhat more likely to acknowledge these alternative discourses and perceptions of identity. In fact, more recent studies have accepted that the “notion of any organization having a single identity is unrealistic in today's hyper-image driven world” (Corley 1170; see also Alvesson). These studies acknowledge that alternative identities exist, yet they still seem focused on locating the most effective means for encouraging employees to abandon those perspectives and identify with the management-sponsored version of identity. These traditional approaches to studying branding and organizational identity, therefore, seem

limited by this top-down approach that necessarily strives for the dominance of the official, management-sponsored brand.

Most studies of branding and organizational identity from rhetoric and professional communication literature are discourse and linguistic analyses of how companies deploy language to enact certain aspects of their identities for certain audiences. For example, Swales and Rogers perform a discourse analysis of mission statements from two corporations, and they find that each corporation uses the mission statement to ensure employee “buy-in.” Ran and Duimering use their analysis of mission statements to demonstrate “how language invokes cognitive categorization processes to construct an image of the organization’s identity” (164). And Shaver discusses an assignment where she has students look for key messages—the points that an organization wants audiences to take away from a piece of communication—on company websites. She found that many companies deploy the same concepts, if not the same words, including innovation, a focus on the customer, and a commitment to the environment (Shaver 220). Some of these studies are particularly interested in the ways these texts work as an appeal to *ethos*. Isaksson and Flyvholm Jørgensen found that websites of public relations agencies in Europe were more likely to create ethos through referencing their expertise than through talking about their trustworthiness or empathy, which the authors see as mirrors of Aristotle’s intelligence, character, and goodwill (121). And, Stallworth Williams compared the websites from two groups of firms on the 2006 Fortune 1000 list and found that they all employed fairly similar strategies for creating corporate ethos. Still other studies from rhetoric and professional communication explore the connections between organizational change and the concepts of organizational identity, image, and culture. Faber claims that organizational

change is a process that is grounded in the rhetorical alignment of organizational identity and organizational image (*Community*). And, Wright argues that the full adoption of technologies by organizations requires more than simple policy shifts. There must also be a shift in organizational identity and organizational culture, or the policy shift will be largely ineffective.

All of these different perspectives on the study of organizational identity are complicated by the fact that they all use similar terminology, but they use it in different ways. The term “brand,” for instance, is often conflated in some studies with the visual identity of an organization, but other studies use it to mean the feeling left in the minds of the audience about the organization. I, however, will use this terminology in very specific ways in order to communicate my theoretical perspectives and my findings.

First, a brand is not simply the visuals used to identify an organization. Logos and color palettes are only one aspect of what has been called the “brand identity mix” (Baker and Balmer 368). On the whole, many scholars associate a brand with a promise made by the organization about its products or services (Balmer 257). They consider it to be an understanding by the organization’s audiences that they know the organization in some way and can trust it to act accordingly: “In its most basic form, a brand is a feeling. It is a feeling that ‘I know what this institution stands for, I can rely on it to be consistent, and I can trust it to be honest.’ . . . A brand, then, is really a promise made and a promise kept” (Lauer 51). Brands are seen as something not just produced and deployed by the organization, but as something that is “co-produced with consumers and other stakeholders” (Csaba and Bengtsson 124). This is where my usage of the terminology will diverge from traditional usage. Rather than a co-constructed feeling left in the minds of audience members, in this dissertation, I use the term

“brand” to mean the official, leadership-sponsored identity of the university as it is represented by the Office of University Relations and their branding guidelines and resources. I do this for two reasons. First, my experience—both as a researcher and in the course of my own departmental responsibilities—indicates that this is how the term is used by members of the Virginia Tech community. They refer to University Relations’ branding guidelines and resources as “the brand,” often with accompanying air-quotes. In order to honor that local usage and the potentially resistant nature of that usage, I will use the term in a similar way. Second, my usage of the term allows for an easy distinction between the official, leadership-sponsored identity (“the brand”) and any unofficial or alternative identity-rhetorics that I encounter throughout my research.

My usage of the term “identity,” on the other hand, will align with the traditional usage. In most cases, scholars use “organizational identity” to mean the ways employees of a company or members of an organization perceive it. In their seminal article on organizational identity, Stuart Albert and David Whetten say that the concept asks the question “Who are we?” as an organization (90). It “refers to what employees feel and think about their organization. [And it] focuses on questions relating to organisational culture” (Balmer 254). In fact, it is those aspects of the organization and its culture that are necessarily central, enduring, and distinctive (Albert and Whetten 90). Faber calls it “the visible, performed interpretation of organizational culture” (Faber, *Community* 27). In other words, an organization’s identity is how the members of the organization, rather than its external audiences, feel about and represent the organization, and in this dissertation, members of the organization include the university’s faculty, staff, and students.

Organizational identity connects to organizational culture. An organization's identity obviously reflects aspects of its culture (Albert and Whetten 91). In fact, I would claim that the various conceptions of organizational identity are one aspect of an organization's culture. Other rules and norms also contribute to create a culture that embodies the "predominant attitudes and behavior within an organization" (Wright 81). Robert Heath claims that organizational culture is the "narrative memory of an organization, what is done and said" (22). This record of an organization's discourses and actions creates the rules and norms that form the organization's culture, which reflexively functions as a "symbolic context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed and intentions to influence organizational image are formulated" (Hatch and Schultz 360).

Finally, an organization's image is "how interested outsiders view the organization" (Faber, *Community* 33). Where identity is concerned with how the members of an organization view the organization, image is concerned with how external audiences view it. Think of it as a component of an organization's *ethos* (Faber, *Community* 35). Therefore, one of the main objectives of a brand is to exert some sort of control over an organization's image (Balmer 255). This aspect of the brand, however, is not the main concern of this dissertation. My main concern, rather, is with how the various identity-rhetorics—the ways in which organizational members talk about who they are as an organization—interact and struggle with each other for the power to affect the course of the organization.

Therefore, my concentration will be on the internal perceptions of the organization, on its various organizational identities. This includes the brand. The brand is a version of organizational identity because it is the internal perception of the organization as conceived by

the organization's leadership. In the case of Virginia Tech, that leadership is represented by the Office of University Relations. It is not the only version of organizational identity, however. Other identities exist, and these alternative identities often create tension within the organization. These tensions are exactly what most management-centric research on organizational identity attempts to alleviate. Those studies typically approach the subject from the assumption that "a vital part of management includes developing, controlling, and securing work and organizational identities" (Alvesson 883). From an integrated marketing perspective, this consistency in the perception and communication of identity and brand-related messages is considered imperative because it unites communication efforts across the organization in terms of the messages produced and disseminated. Otherwise, marketing and management professionals and scholars argue that mixed messages get out, and the organization loses the valuable ethos (and image) of a unified, purposeful organization. But I argue that this level of unity is not really achievable (nor even desirable) in a decentralized university setting with such varied purposes, audiences, and messages.

My study responds to this management-centric limitation by acknowledging and seeking out this potential for alternative rhetorics of identity. I concentrate on their potential rhetorical effects on the organization, rather than on weakening them or incorporating them into a management-sponsored rhetoric of identity. I explore the roles of these various identity-rhetorics and the power relations involved in their struggles with the official branded identity. My purpose, then, is to determine how the rhetorics of organizational identity (both dominant and alternative perspectives) not only affect each other, but also how they affect the course of the university itself. A rhetorically-grounded approach, which is based on identity-formation

through language, acknowledges the role of rhetoric in organizational life, and recognizes its potential impact on organizational activity, allows me to do that.

Research Site and Questions

I accomplish this goal through an in-depth study of the many rhetorics of organizational identity at Virginia Tech. Specifically, I explore three case studies of university policy creation and strategic decision making where the official brand of the university and alternative identity-rhetorics struggle for the power to shape organizational practice: the creation of the 2012-2018 university strategic plan, the controversy over the destruction of part of Stadium Woods—an 11-acre plot of old-growth forest on Virginia Tech’s campus—to build an athletic practice facility, and the evolution of the brand itself since its launch in February, 2006. By concentrating on the relationship between these case studies of organizational decision making and the rhetorics of identity used by the various members of the university within these cases, I engage the concepts of organizational identity and branding from a new perspective that acknowledges more than just leadership’s power to shape identity. By uncovering the power relations involved when the various identity-rhetorics (including the brand) contradict, reflect, and co-construct each other and organizational practice, this dissertation demonstrates that alternative identities do have the potential to shape the course of the university. Recognizing this potential power allows researchers, teachers, and practitioners of professional and technical writing to better understand branding initiatives and their role within organizations. Specifically within educational institutions, I suggest that branding initiatives be critiqued as potentially hegemonic forces that repress alternative identities, which may provide necessary

incentives or conduits for organizational growth. Furthermore, this dissertation will allow us to infer some best practices for the creation and maintenance of organizational branding initiatives.

I choose Virginia Tech as my research site because its leadership-sponsored brand is particularly well-developed and incorporated into the culture of the university. Not only is the branded identity of the university fully articulated in the guidelines and resources provided by the Office of University Relations, but they have also made explicit efforts to educate members of the organization in its use. This includes a training program where employees can become “brand ambassadors” for their own units, acting to unify the ways the university’s identity is represented across the organization. This high level of brand development and cultural incorporation at Virginia Tech allows me to locate contradictions and discordances between the brand and alternative identity-rhetorics, and it allows members of the university community to articulate their own perceptions of these contradictions and discordances. This stark contrast allows me to identify which identity-rhetorics have the power to affect organizational practice, and which do not, effectively determining how hegemonic the official brand really is.

With those goals in mind, the following research questions guide this dissertation:

- In the struggle to shape university practice in these three cases, which rhetorics of organizational identity have the necessary power to affect the course of Virginia Tech as an organization?
- How is that power reified in each specific case?
- What is the nature of the power relations between the various rhetorics of organizational identity at Virginia Tech, particularly between the official, leadership-

sponsored brand of the university and the alternative rhetorics of organizational identity? Is the brand hegemonic?

To further explore these questions and their relevance to researchers, teachers, and practitioners of professional writing, this dissertation is organized in the following manner. In Chapter 2, I argue that various rhetorics of organizational identity exist within organizations, but only those rhetorics with the power to shape organizational practice actually become part of the organization's consubstantial identity through the rhetorical process of identification. I call this type of power "identity-power," and it is theoretically grounded in social theories of power, structure, and agency. In Chapter 3, I describe my research site, Virginia Tech, and my three case studies of organizational policy-formation and strategic decision making. I explain what makes Virginia Tech particularly useful for a study on organizational identity and branding, and I describe my methods of data collection and analysis, including ethnographic interviews with members of the Virginia Tech community, participant-observation, and analysis of various verbal, visual, and multimodal texts related to each case study.

Chapters 4 through 6 discuss my three cases of organizational policy-making and strategic decision making: the 2012-2018 strategic plan, the Stadium Woods controversy, and the evolution of the brand itself. In these chapters, I explore how the various rhetorics of organizational identity struggled with each other for the power to shape the course of the university in each specific case. I determine which identity-rhetorics aligned across enough of the university to shape the organization's policies and practices. And, with the university's official brand as a point of comparison, I locate the power relations involved when any alternative identity-rhetorics become involved. Finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss my conclusions

about organizational identity, identity-power, and the hegemony of the brand at Virginia Tech, and I explore the theoretical, practical, and pedagogical implications of those findings for the field of professional and technical writing.

Conclusion

As a whole, this dissertation produces an in-depth understanding of the many rhetorics of organizational identity at Virginia Tech through an investigation of three case studies in which leadership-sponsored and alternative rhetorics of identity struggle for the power to shape the university itself. I explore how these identity-rhetorics, particularly within a large, research university setting, can have lasting effects on that organization by directly influencing its policies and strategic decision making processes. And, I demonstrate how the official, leadership-sponsored brand has the potential to be a hegemonic force within the university's culture that begs critique. By concentrating on university texts, I engage the concepts of organizational identity and branding from a new perspective that explores the ways that alternative rhetorics of identity and the institution's official, leadership-sponsored brand contradict, reflect, and co-construct each other and organizational practice through the rhetorical process of identification. Furthermore, I show how rhetoric empowers members of the university community (including leadership as well as other faculty, staff, and students) with the agency to shape the course of the university.

As noted above, now is the time to study organizational identity at Virginia Tech. The established core brand represents an explicit, potentially hegemonic effort to encourage identification and adoption of the leadership-sponsored identity, but the probability remains

that other identity perceptions may exist. By studying the various identity-rhetorics involved in these three cases of organizational decision making, we have the opportunity to more fully understand the effects of and the power structures around branding initiatives within the organizations where we work, particularly universities. While this case study is not necessarily directly generalizable to how organizational identity, branding, and organizational practice are related in all other organizations, it explores and expands our understanding of the creation of organizational identities, the long-lasting effects of the rhetorics of organizational identity, as well as the connections between discourse, power, and collective activity within a complex organizational setting.

Chapter 2

Identity-Rhetorics and Identity-Power: A Theoretical Frame

In their article “The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority,” Jennifer Daryl Slack, David James Miller, and Jeffrey Doak claim that technical communicators have the power to not only transmit an organization’s message to its audience, but they also have the power to create meaning for that organization. Slack, Miller, and Doak specifically address the concept of authorship. To them, authorship is the power that technical communicators have to keep “adding, deleting, changing, and selecting meaning” for the organization (Slack, Miller, and Doak 172). As they define it, organizational meaning is an articulation of identity, which is in constant flux: “Like any identity, meaning—both instances and the general concept—can be understood as an articulation that moves through ongoing processes of rearticulation” (Slack, Miller, and Doak 170). In this chapter, I extend Slack, Miller, and Doak to argue that this power to create meaning and identity for an organization is not limited to individuals who profess to be professional or technical communicators—those whose job it is to communicate with external audiences. Neither is this power limited to those in managerial positions. All members of an organization are potential professional communicators as they interact with each other and external audiences in the course of their work and lives. Therefore, I argue that the power to create identity for an organization is potentially available to every organizational member through the power and agency granted by rhetoric and the process of identification. Furthermore, the process of identification does more than simply

reflect or even modify the established identity discourse. It has the potential to shape the organization itself—to affect organizational practice.

As argued in Chapter 1, while the concepts of organizational identity, university identity, and brand have been studied extensively within the fields of marketing, organizational communication, and organizational behavior, those fields approach these concepts from a very management-centric perspective. They have a tendency to discount or entirely ignore alternative identity perceptions within the organization. A rhetorically-grounded approach, on the other hand, which recognizes that identities are formed through identification and acknowledges the role of language in organizational activity allows for these other identities to contribute to organizational meaning-making and organizational practice. In this chapter, I use theories of rhetoric, identity, and power to explain how identifications shape what we do. I make a case for the power of identity-rhetorics—the rhetorical ways in which we describe ourselves and our organizations—to shape the policies and practices of an organization. Furthermore, I argue that many identity-rhetorics exist within an organization—often including an official brand and many unofficial identities that may conflict with that brand and with each other—but only a few have the power to become part of an organization’s culture and therefore affect organizational practice. From this perspective, I demonstrate the value of rhetoric as a method for driving organizational activity as well as an analytical tool within the study of organizational identity and branding, thus contributing to the understanding of how brands affect organizations as well as to the understanding of rhetoric in action.

Rhetoric, Identification, and Organizational Practice

Branding—essentially an attempt by management to encourage identification with their version of the organization’s identity—is a very rhetorical act. According to Kenneth Burke, identification is attained through the use of symbol systems—the visual, spoken, and textual languages we use as we build our social realities ("Terministic" 48). In fact, in Burkean terms, rhetoric is the strategic use of various symbol systems to move audiences to identify with the rhetor—to make them “consubstantial” with him or her. In this way, rhetoric’s primary concern is leading audiences to see in themselves aspects of the rhetor or the rhetor’s cause (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 20-21). Only then—when the audience has reached some level of identification—can they adopt the attitude or take the action being proposed by the rhetor. In terms of branding, whether the audience in question is an external stakeholder or an internal employee, they must be able to recognize something in the brand—the official, management-sponsored version of the organization’s identity—that they identify with in some way before it can move them to act by donating their time or money to the cause, purchasing the product or service, applying for admission to a university, or metaphorically buying into the organization’s branded identity. This buy-in is accomplished through the rhetorical process of identification.

In this dissertation, the meaning of rhetoric also goes beyond the strategic use of language for the purposes of identification. Rather, it comes before the strategic use of language. Rhetoric is also a method of recognizing an exigence, analyzing the situation, determining the best means of persuasion, and then deploying a strategic text. Identification occurs after this process and because of it. When organizational members are able to use their own rhetorical skill to determine the most appropriate identity-rhetorics to deploy in a certain

situation, to a certain audience, and in a certain context, then they are able to encourage the identification necessary to move other organizational members to action. In this way, “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (Bitzer 4).

Rhetoric moving audiences through identification is especially relevant to this study of the effects of university branding because identification is central to organizational practice. According to Burke, consubstantiation is an integral part of a group of individuals taking collective action: “in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (*A Rhetoric* 21). Through rhetoric, members of an organization identify with certain aspects of the organization, and those identifications make them consubstantial with each other and with the organization. That consubstantiation leads them to certain collective actions. For example, a university that identifies as a teaching university is going to act in accordance with that identity. Teaching activities will have more weight during tenure and promotion decisions, and departments with excellent teaching records may receive more funding. Since rhetorical language-use is central to identification and the resulting consubstantiality is central to collective action, the language we use when we talk about the ways in which we identify with organizations must have some ultimate effect on organizational practices, policies, and strategies.

Studies in rhetoric and writing, particularly studies of workplace rhetoric using an activity theory and genre theory lens, have consistently shown how the influences of texts and activity work both ways. There is an undeniable “dialectical relationship between genres,

individuals, activities, and contexts” (Bawarshi and Reiff 102). Dorothy Winsor comes to similar conclusions in her nine-year multiple case study of four engineering students: “text shapes context as well as vice versa. If the four engineers behave in a certain way and get others to behave in a certain way, then the companies for which they work take one form rather than another” (“Genre” 220). In other words, these four engineers were able to effect change within the company itself through their use of rhetoric, even as entry-level employees.

Spinuzzi provides another example of this relationship between text and activity in his study of the Iowa State Highway Department. By tracing the genres involved in the activity system of analyzing traffic accident patterns, he discovered not only the effects that the system had on its subjects and their genre use, but also areas in which the subjects’ genre use changed the system itself. For instance, he found that in the 1970s the data needed to make the appropriate decisions—such things as road improvements, traffic lights, and emergency routes—continued to increase in complexity. The employees responsible for creating those reports were unable to keep up under the existing paper-based system. There was just too much raw data to count by hand, and the reports desired were too complex to be created quickly enough. To overcome these obstacles, the employees created new genres or adapted existing genres like maps and labels to ease the complexities. Eventually these genres created at a local level were made official throughout the state because other employees identified with those problems and recognized the value of the new genres as a solution (Spinuzzi 79-83).

These examples illustrate how scholars in rhetoric and professional communication have established that individuals, organizations, language, and activities mutually construct each other over time, forming a basis for my claim that the rhetorics of organizational identity must

have some effect on organizational practice. With that in mind, my goal is to study the identities of Virginia Tech from a rhetorical perspective that acknowledges this reciprocal relationship between language and practice through the process of identification and consubstantiation. In order to accomplish that goal, I must examine the organizational texts that enact the identities with which organizational members identify.

Enacting Organizational Identity-Rhetorics

According to Heath, an organization's culture "contains knowledge of the company (expressed as beliefs and attitudes), as well as its values, roles, and rules" (9). This organizational culture "contains the social reality people use to know what they are expected to do" (Heath 5). I argue that this social reality of organizational culture includes various identity-rhetorics with which members of the organization identify. These identity-rhetorics originate within the cultural and social discourses of the organization itself, and they are enacted through members' use of rhetoric and language.

James Paul Gee defines a discourse as "a sort of kit" made of words, values, and attitudes—the things upon which human beings draw in order to make meaning (Gee, 3rd ed. 40). As such, discourses are the historical, cultural, and social structures of knowledge that human beings use to produce and interpret responses to social situations. They serve as rhetorical tools within social life by functioning "as menus of discursive resources which various social actors draw on in different ways at different times to achieve their particular purposes" (Watson 817). This conception of discourse is similar to Fairclough's conception of "member resources," "which people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret

texts—including their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on” (*Language* 20).

As rhetorical, social resources, these discourses are irrevocably tied to identification. When human beings begin to identify with certain groups, they acquire and identify with the discourses of that group—their discursive resources, their values, and their attitudes. This is especially true within organizations. As members identify with an organization, part of the identification process is developing an understanding of the relevant discourses, and these discourses provide members with “distinctive ways, in mind, body, and social practice, to mark oneself” as a member of that organization “and to engage in social activities seen as part and parcel of this identity” (Gee, 1st ed. 36). For example, new students at a university will quickly assimilate a large amount of information about the school in the first few weeks on campus, which often includes traditions for athletic or social events, attitudes about other universities or programs, and value propositions related to the university’s core missions. As organizational members acquire organizational discourses such as these, they become consubstantial with other members of the organization, with the activities of the organization, and with the perceived values of the organization through identification with the various identity-rhetorics contained within those discourses.

Identity-rhetorics, therefore, are the various aspects of an organization’s identity that originate within the cultural and social discourses of the organization, and these identity-rhetorics are enacted through language when organizational member’s talk or write about “who we are” as an organization. In fact, Gee claims that one of the primary functions of human language is “to scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and

institutions” (1st ed. 1). And, Cheney says that identification “takes place primarily through the transcendent power of language” (18). The ways in which people write and speak about an organization, therefore, are the main conduits for identification, the central process of forming and maintaining organizational identities. For example, universities often have unique languages all their own. University mottos, athletic chants and cheers, and even the use of school colors are ways that members identify with the university and demonstrate their consubstantiality with other university members and supporters. Gee says that we create our social worlds through language: “we always actively use spoken and written language to create or build the world of activities and institutions around us” (1st ed. 11). From this perspective, language is the mechanism through which we create and moderate our collective values and goals within organizational life—our organizational identities. In other words, the various identity-rhetorics that form our collective identities are created and maintained through the texts and discourses that circulate within organizations

Within these organizational texts, members of the organization enact certain identity-rhetorics. Gee claims that utterances have meaning because they communicate a socially-situated identity and a socially situated activity (1st ed. 13). Therefore, our use of language allows us to define who we are and what we are doing at any particular time, which is a function of epideictic rhetoric. Celeste Condit claims that epideictic rhetoric creates, communicates, and performs the shared identities of communities of individuals (Condit 291). These shared identities are rhetorically enacted through the labels we attach to the organization within organizational texts. For a university, that label could be as complex as “land-grant,” or it could be as simple as “small.” Either way, “when we attach a linguistic label

to an organization, we place it in a category” (Ran and Duimering 163). And, the categories organizational members choose tell us something about the ways in which they identify with the organization and how they feel about those identifications:

the language of an organizational identity claim sets up a system of conceptual and social categories, defining the organization in relation to this classification scheme. We show, however, that such identity claims do much more than simply classify organizations as members of conventional, institutionalized social or industrial categories. An identity claim establishes an idiosyncratic system of value-laden categories; [and] positions the organization positively or negatively within these categories” (Ran and Duimering 157)

So, by examining the language and texts of organizational members, we can see how they identify with each other and with the organization by analyzing the identity-rhetorics they enact when talking or writing about different organizational situations and contexts.

Furthermore, we can understand not only their perceptions of organizational identity and how they personally identify (or don’t identify) with the organization, but we can also get a sense of the values that they place on those identities.

One way in which identity-rhetorics are enacted through rhetoric is by the telling and retelling of organizational narratives. Organizational narratives are the stories members tell when talking about who they are as an organization, what they have done as an organization, and how they feel about the organization: “The identities of social groups and the subjectivities of those who belong to these groups are produced and reproduced in part by narrative” (Perkins and Blyler 21). These stories provide organizational values, rules, and roles with which

members identify as well as their evaluation of those values, rules, and roles. Narratives function as metaphors for the organization: "In this way, a narrative stands in for, or represents, our experiences, and it enables us to construct an identity within those experiences" (Faber, *Community* 32). These narrative-formed identities are powerful because they "structure the very notion of 'organizational practice' for social actors, privileging certain practices over others" (Mumby, "Political" 118). In other words, the identity-rhetorics communicated through organizational narratives work to establish rules about what is and what is not acceptable behavior, therefore shaping the policies and activities of the organization and its members. For example, if a university's identity is partly based on stories of how it has consistently partnered with community organizations, then university policies will probably begin to reflect that identity through the establishment of outreach and community partnership offices, grants, and training. The stories we tell ourselves about who we are "provide a rationale for decision and action. As such, they not only constrain behavior, they may also determine it" (Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm" 364).

Rhetorical Enactment of Identity-Rhetorics

Since members who strongly identify with an organization are likely more committed to it, managers within organizations are often encouraged to use language in strategic ways that will encourage members to acknowledge their joint interests with the organization. (Swales and Rogers 224; Ashforth and Mael 26). For example, managers could use specific words associated with the organization's mission, values, and goals, or they could reference narratives about organizational successes. It could even be as simple as using the word "we" to encourage the feeling of consubstantiality (Cheney 5). Once members perceive joint interests with each other

and with the organization as a whole, they begin to commit to the organization, and this commitment through identification is integral to collective, organizational action because members who are committed to the organization take part in and work toward group success and status (Ashforth and Mael 22).

Using organizational rhetoric to strategically affect the ways members identify with the organization seems to be a common theme in much of the work done on organizational identity and organizational change. Several studies demonstrate how managers can use powerful identity-rhetorics to encourage identification and shape the organization's future. In fact, Cheney claims that the purpose of organizational rhetoric is to manage the identities of an organization and its members (23). For instance, Faber shows that managing identity-related narratives can lead to cultural shifts, which alter the ways in which its internal and external audiences view the organization, leading to organizational change (*Community* 28). And, David Wright argues that rhetorically shifting the ways faculty identify with various university identities is central to the process of changing university culture to accept new policies (94).

Faber takes the position that any organization not actively shaping its own identity through the use of strategic identity-rhetorics is "in danger of having that identity formed by other potentially hostile forces," and that possibility is dangerous because "one can never predict what kind of tales others might tell" (*Community* 41, 32). This management-centric approach aims for a hegemony of identity in which alternative identities are suppressed and the reproduction of the management-sponsored identity is ensured. In such a case, management's version of identity is reinforced "so that the members of the audience will make

decisions in accord with the preferences of the controlling members of the organization" (Cheney 8).

Corley's study of a spin-off company, however, shows that other organizational identities can still resist this hegemony of identity. In his study, the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy and the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy had incompatible perceptions of the organization's identity. By explicitly communicating their version of identity, management attempted to change the ways that the lower levels of the hierarchy identified with the organization. The lower levels of the organization's hierarchy resisted the identity change, however, by maintaining their original perceptions of the organization (Corley 1172). This resistance is key to my argument that the power to create a consubstantial identity that shapes organizational practice is not exclusive to organizational leadership. If management can strategically make rhetorical choices to use specific identity-rhetorics to encourage identification and affect organizational change, then organizational members should also be able to make those rhetorical choices and affect organizational policy and practice.

Furthermore, this rhetorical process that allows various identity-rhetorics within an organization to have some effect on the course of the organization is not a linear process. Just as identity informs the organization's activity, activity also informs identity. In fact, projecting a certain identity requires that organizational identities align with organizational actions: "To be a particular *who* and pull off a particular *what* requires that we act, value, interact, and use language *in sync with* or *in coordination with* other people and with various objects ("props") in appropriate locations and at appropriate times" (Gee, 1st ed. 14; emphasis in orig.). In other words, a stable organizational identity depends upon organizational activity lining up with

organizational rhetorics that shape that identity. That is why this cycle of identity and activity never ends. Both are constantly being produced and reproduced as the organization changes and as organizational membership changes, so the rhetorics of organizational identity, the rhetorical enactment of that identity by organizational members, and organizational activity each contribute to the cycle and further the reproduction of organizational identity. In short, identity and activity continuously shape and reshape each other through the power of rhetoric and identification (see fig. 2.1).

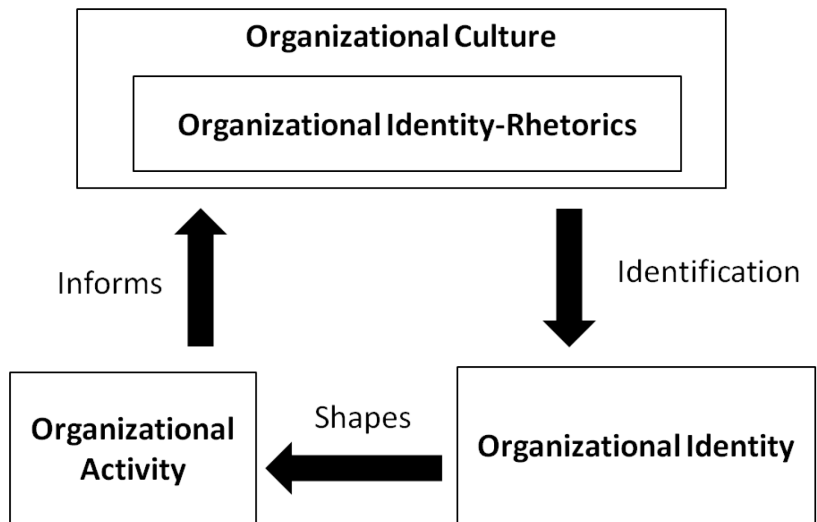


Figure 2.1 The cycle of identity and activity production and reproduction.

A Theory of Identity-Power

In fact, organizational identity is never truly stable because of this constant process of change. It is always evolving and constantly being produced and reproduced through identification. Furthermore, there are often numerous texts and discourses that enact numerous rhetorics of identity, especially within large, decentralized organizations like universities. Some scholars even argue that it is impossible for large organizations to have monolithic, stable identities because there are so many identities involved (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley; Humphreys and Brown). Organizations are “choruses of diverse voices,” and with so many voices involved in the process of identification and consubstantiation, it is virtually

impossible for large organizations to form one, stable, consubstantial identity with which all members of an organization identify (Waymer 223). Universities, for example, are made up of several layers of voices, often each with their own identities within the larger organizational culture: colleges and schools, administrative units and athletics, academic departments, and student as well as governance organizations.

In this section, I argue that these various identity-rhetorics compete for legitimacy within the university, and those that contribute to the university's consubstantial identity through identification have what I call *identity-power*. According to George Cheney, "to understand and analyze organizational rhetoric, then, we must begin with Burke's conception of rhetoric as identification and then complicate it for application to complex organizations" (*Rhetoric* 15). By acknowledging these various identifications of organizational identity, including the dominant identities related to the official brand and alternative perceptions of identity held by other members of the organization like students, faculty, and staff, we begin to complicate these ideas of organizational identity and identification. Albert and Whetten admit that a multitude of identities may exist within an organization, and they "may be compatible, complementary, unrelated, or even contradictory" to each other (92). In these cases, various identity-rhetorics struggle for legitimacy and dominance within the organization. And, whichever identity-rhetorics have the power to become part of the organization's consubstantial identity through identification become capable of also shaping the organization's policy and practice.

The struggle for dominance and legitimacy between social and cultural structures of knowledge is at the core of Michel Foucault's work. His core archaeological question has to do

with the ways in which dominant ideas were legitimated and maintained (Scott, Longo, and Wills 13). He phrases it as “how is it that one particular statement appeared [within a discourse] rather than another?” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 27). As structures of knowledge compete for legitimacy, they deploy what power they have to change (or maintain) the current, dominant structure. This happens again and again throughout cultures and organizations. Similarly, organizational identity-rhetorics are structures of organizational knowledge that compete with each other for the power to define the organization and, therefore, drive organizational practice.

Foucault’s conception of power is that it does not exist as something in and of itself. Power is only reified in its deployment. This “assertion that power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action,” is a core quality of his theory of power/knowledge (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 89). In this theory of power, power comes before knowledge, and we only accept knowledge as true because of its power to assert itself as true (Faber, *Community* 114). And that truth maintains its status as knowledge—its power—because the conventions and cultures in which we live reproduce that power through discourse and language (Fairclough, *Discourse* 67). In terms of organizational identities, those identity-rhetorics with which members identify are the identity-rhetorics with power because those are the identities that are accepted as true by organizational members. This power to become accepted as truth can come from a number of sources, such as the dominant authority or rhetorical prowess of the group enacting it (like in the cases of management-enacted identity-rhetorics above). If another identity-rhetoric, however, exerts enough power to gain the status of truth, then it can compete with and displace the original

identity. Only then, after members of an organization identify with an identity-rhetoric and it becomes part of the organization's consubstantial identity, can it affect the course of the organization.

Again, I argue that this power to create an organization's identity and therefore affect organizational practice is available to any member of the organization, not just leadership, and I argue that alternative identity-rhetorics can have the power to resist, replace, or modify official identity-rhetorics within the organization's consubstantial identity. In other words, there is a possibility for agency within the university's structures of power/knowledge. Since structures of knowledge (or identity) maintain their dominance only through the constant reproduction and naturalization of their values and belief systems, significant resistance to dominant identity-rhetorics begins to destabilize that structure. Faber claims that "if currently powerful agents are unable to maintain the conditions by which their power is naturalized, their status will erode and fade as new agents replace the old order with their own social infrastructures" (*Community* 119).

In Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, social structures evolve over time because agents use the resources provided to them within those social structures to reproduce or change those structures. He claims that resources are the "media through which power is exercised," and he adds that "all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the *dialectic of control* in social systems" (Giddens 16). Winsor summarizes the dialectic of control by saying that structural resources "function as the source of the power the individual needs to act" ("Using" 412). With these resources, subjects of social structures can also be agents within

those structures, and “agency implies power” (Giddens 9). Agents have the power to take action, and “action depends upon the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events” (Giddens 14). Resistance to the management-sponsored identity, such as that shown by Corley’s participants, is an example of this type of agency. It begins to erode the power associated with dominant rhetorics of identity and leaves room for alternative rhetorics of identity to potentially come to power and shape the organization through identification and consubstantiation.

In that case, identity-rhetorics function as structural resources within the university social system, and agents are able to draw on those resources as they make identity claims about the organization within their daily work and lives. Those identity-rhetorics that are continually produced and reproduced within this process begin to shape organizational practice. These are the identity-rhetorics with identity-power³. Faber defines a particular type of organizational power, which he calls image-power, as the ability to create and control the ways that an organization’s audiences view its external image (Faber, *Community* 122). I argue that identity-power is a similar type of power, but focused on the organization’s internal identity. Identity-power is the power to shape the organization’s internal, consubstantial identity, which is formed through identification with organizational identity-rhetorics and shapes organizational activity.

Identity-power is reified when members of the organization become consubstantial with each other, when they identify with a particular identity-rhetoric. That consubstantial,

³ In this dissertation, identity-power is a special kind of power that is associated with a particular identity-rhetoric. Agency, on the other hand, implies a type of power associated with organizational members. The two concepts are intricately connected and often overlap, but they are not coterminous.

organizational identity, then, is able to shape organizational policy and practice (see fig 2.2). Any identity-rhetoric has the potential to have identity-power, but organizations that strategically create and control their own

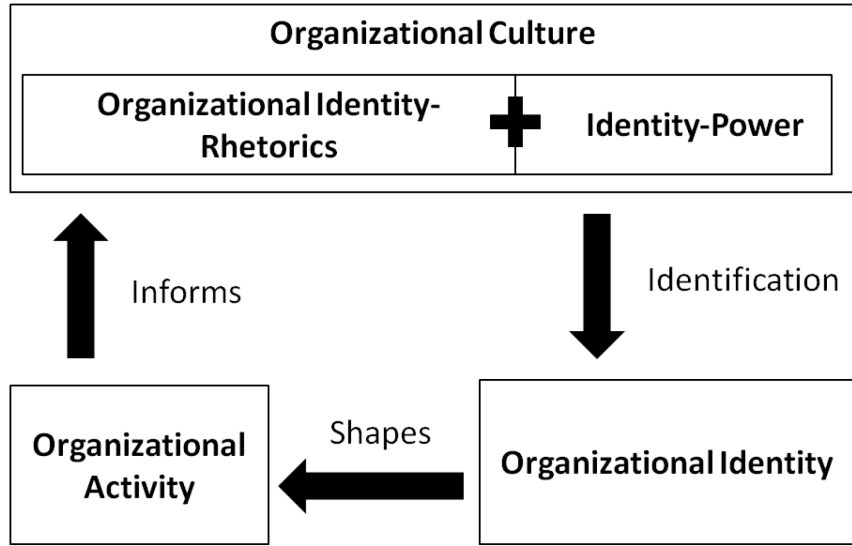


Figure 2.2. The cycle of identity-power, identity, and activity.

identities are likely to have very powerful management-sponsored identities, which I am calling a “brand.” Therefore, they will also actively work to repress alternative identity-rhetorics that do not align with the official brand of the organization. These dominant organizational rhetorics “do not simply inform organization members about the values, practices, and traditions to which their organization is committed. Rather, they help to constitute the organizational consciousness of social actors by articulating and embodying a particular reality, and subordinating or devaluing other modes of “organization rationality” (Mumby, “Political” 125). I argue, however, that these subordinated or devalued versions of organizational identity can have the identity-power to contribute to the organizational consciousness, shifting the organization’s identity through identification and helping to shape the course of the organization.

Conclusion

In this project, I use three case studies of organizational decision making and policy-creation at Virginia Tech to explore this possibility—whether alternative rhetorics of identity have any identity-power with which to affect the course of the organization or if the official brand of the university is the only identity that has sufficient identity-power to shape organizational policy and practice. As a dominant organizational rhetoric, the brand is admittedly useful in creating a state of consubstantiality that gives the organization direction, but such a stable, monolithic identity is not only impossible in such a large organization, it also demands criticism:

Foucault argued that analysis needs to rigorously investigate structures, wherever they appear, and thereby demonstrate how humans have become unknowingly complicit with organizational power. Such analysis would show how people have taken for granted medical, legal, governmental, or pedagogical authority and voluntarily (or unconsciously) allowed themselves to be defined according to these structures. (Faber, *Community* 79)

A single, consistent perspective of an organization's identity may be an effective strategy for organizational managers, but it also comes with potential problems. Dominant organizational identities can protect an organization, but they also "can be dangerous because, as filters, they can limit a field of vision and establish a false sense of security that distracts from important matters at hand" (Faber, *Community* 171).

In response to this concern and to Carl Herndl's call for researchers of professional writing to avoid reproducing the dominant discourses of the professional contexts we study,

this project will actively seek out various discourses of university identity within Virginia Tech and search for the ways in which they may deploy identity-power to shape the course of the organization (Herndl 228). By studying the discourses of organizational identity at Virginia Tech, I will be able to more fully explore its various rhetorics of organizational identity. That exploration of both official and unofficial rhetorics within specific, situated case studies of organizational decision making and policy creation allows me to theorize the relative power and influence of those multiple voices on each other and on the course of university itself.

In the next chapter, I explain how I explore the identity-rhetorics at Virginia Tech and how they are reflected in three cases studies of organizational practice. By studying organizational identity-rhetorics through these sources of discourse production and reproduction, I explore the formation of organizational identity, the power relations involved, and the potential effects of both official rhetorics and alternative rhetorics of organizational identity on the policies and practices of a complex organization.

Chapter 3

Research Site and Methods

In order to explore the various identity-rhetorics that drive the university's practice as well as the power relations between those various identity-rhetorics, I collected qualitative, ethnographic data about member perceptions of the university's identity and about each of my cases of university decision making and policy creation. My goal was to create "detailed and individuated accounts" of organizational identity's role in university practice and the power structures that govern how the various organizational identities—both the official brand and other versions of organizational identity—are produced and reproduced by university members (Newkirk 132). As shown in Chapter 2, various theories of the role of discourse in social structures allow for these connections between organizational identity, power, and organizational activity, but my purpose is to explain their relations within specific situations that occur within a complex organizational setting. Qualitative, ethnographic data, therefore, allows me to fully explore my cases in order to explain and refine the theoretical perspectives that guide the critical study of organizational communication and practice (Cross 130).

In this chapter, I describe my research site, Virginia Tech, in more depth, including a description of the official, leadership-sponsored brand of the university and its history. I also explain how this very explicit, official brand and the various efforts currently underway to promote that brand on campus makes Virginia Tech an ideal site for the study of university branding and organizational identity. Then, I describe how I selected my three cases of organizational decision making as well as my methods of data collection and analysis.

Research Site

The situated case of university identity that I observe and analyze in this dissertation is the discourse of organizational identity at Virginia Tech. This discourse includes the university's official, leadership-sponsored brand as well as other perceptions of organizational identity that are held by members of the university. The official brand was adopted by Virginia Tech in February of 2006. That brand is intended to guide communication efforts across campus and includes a logo, a tagline, and visual standards for web and print documents, as well as a style guide for language use and the Brand Platform. The Brand Platform spells out the common messages that leadership wants to guide news stories and marketing campaigns across the campus, and it includes the

Positioning Statement, the Brand Promise, Brand Drivers, and the university's tagline (see fig. 3.1).

Unlike most corporate brands, this overarching identity is one among many that the university simultaneously maintains. These many identities include various sub-brands and independent brands that are related to the university, including Virginia Tech Athletics and The Virginia Tech Foundation, as

Positioning Statement: Virginia Tech is a high-performing research university with a world-view that advances the land-grant values of discovery, learning, and outreach. We serve and engage the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the nation, and the world. We attract motivated high-achieving students, staff, and faculty who excel in an academically energized, technologically creative, and culturally inclusive learning community. Our bold spirit, climate of innovation and service, open boundaries of study and research, and entrepreneurial approach positively transform lives and communities.

Brand Promise: Quality, Innovation, Results

Brand Drivers:

- Nationally and internationally recognized faculty experts
- Groundbreaking research and eminent scholarship
- Challenging academic standards
- Technological leadership
- Service to community and society

Tagline: Invent the Future

Figure 3.1. The Virginia Tech Brand Platform provides a textual explanation of the message intended to be communicated through the branding process (VT, "Brand"). Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

well as several others (VT, “Brand”). While the identity presented in the brand platform is what Virginia Tech calls its “core brand,” these ancillary brands no doubt contribute to the university’s discourse of organizational identity. Some members of the organization may identify with one or more of these ancillary brands to a greater degree than the core brand, or a particular use of rhetoric may reflect one of these ancillary brands in addition to or in place of the core brand.

Furthermore, Virginia Tech’s external image since the campus shootings on April 16, 2007, has had a definite effect on the organization’s internal identity. Various lawsuits and other incidents on campus continue to keep stakeholder attention focused on the tragedy and the university’s response. This continued attention to a university-wide tragedy creates another aspect of the university’s identity that competes with the brand. The point here is that many discourses are involved in the production and reproduction of organizational identity. Some will be part of official, sanctioned brands or sub-brands of the university. Others may be external discourses of university image that also affect the way the university views itself. Still others may be unofficial identities that members of the university are working to incorporate into the official identity. My project seeks to study various internal discourses of identity and discover their relative power and influence on the the strategic activity of the university; however, the core brand is at the center of my project. As the university’s core identity (as perceived by leadership), it will serve as a point of comparison and analysis for other rhetorics of identity.

The core brand and the Brand Platform exist to establish in no uncertain terms what the messages of the branding process should be, from the perspective of the university’s leadership. This core brand is clearly a move toward that ever-elusive unity of message that the

marketing and management literature so staunchly encourages. Since its launch, university leadership has devoted a significant amount of effort to promoting the brand and encouraging its adoption and usage by communicators and faculty across campus. For instance, Virginia Tech is making explicit efforts to encourage communicators and other members of the university community to embrace the brand through the Brand Ambassador Program, offered by the Department of Marketing and Publications within Virginia Tech's Office of University Relations. The Brand Ambassador Program is specifically designed to train communicators across the university in the use of the brand. These communicators include people working in units such as student affairs, human resources, and alumni relations, as well as academic departments. The program is open to any member of the university community, but each participant typically has some level of responsibility for communicating within and beyond the university. The program consists of 13 one-hour classes in two phases offered in cooperation with the Virginia Tech Faculty Development Institute.

Strategic and explicit efforts at encouraging the adoption and identification with the core brand, like the Brand Ambassador Program, are part of what makes Virginia Tech an ideal research site for my study. Not only has Virginia Tech embraced the concepts of branding and organizational identity as part of its organizational communication strategy, it has also taken explicit steps to unify the discourse, verbal as well as visual, of organizational identity under the core brand, which reflects the values and goals of university leadership. Through these efforts, leadership has established an official discourse about branding and identity within the university, which provides a unique opportunity to look for instances of tension or contradiction between that identity and alternative discourses of identity. The current moment,

therefore, provides an unprecedented “opportunity to learn” (Stake 451). Now is the time to study the discourse of organizational identity at Virginia Tech because the core brand is well-established and unambiguous, due to the efforts of university leadership through programs like the Brand Ambassador Program, but the probability remains that other perceptions and discourses may exist. These alternative perceptions may be equally important to the larger discourse of the university’s identity, and they may have just as much impact on the strategic course of the university.

Research Methods

In order to explore those possibilities and address my research questions about the power relations between various versions of the organization’s identity, I conducted an embedded case study of Virginia Tech’s discursive structures of organizational identity and its decision making and policy-creating activities. Even though a case study of a single organization is not necessarily generalizable to other organizations, the case study method is most suitable for this project because it provides a detailed description of the relationship between organizational identity, power, and organizational activity in a complex organizational setting. This kind of understanding of a single case “will lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake 446). This embedded case study is the first step toward understanding these relationships by examining them in the context a single organization.

An embedded case study is one which studies a single case, but includes multiple units of analysis (Yin 50). Within my case study of Virginia Tech's structures of organizational identity, my multiple units of analysis include:

- Key informants from the university's Office of University Relations,
- The official, leadership-sponsored identity represented in the university's Brand Platform, the Brand Ambassador Program, and various recent marketing campaigns,
- The identity perceptions of university members, including faculty, staff, and students across multiple levels, units, and roles,
- And various texts related to each of my three case studies of organizational decision making and policy creation.

This corpus of data allows me to triangulate, compare, and theorize about the various rhetorics of organizational identity throughout the university, their relationships to each other, and their relationships to the university's strategic activities. I will explain my methods for gathering and analyzing these data more completely below, but first I explain how these various methods led to the selection of my case studies of organizational decision making.

Case Selection

I began data collection by being a participant-observer in the Brand Ambassador Program, in order to understand the brand itself more fully and how leadership sees its role in the daily work of communicators across the university. While completing those observations, I also began interviews with 20 members of the university community, representing faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. During these interviews, I asked participants to reflect on recent university events or situations where they thought that what

they perceived as the university's identity was particularly apparent or brought into question. As my participant-observations and my interviews moved forward, several situations began to seem like viable case studies. From those situations, I determined which cases would best serve my project. Mary Sue MacNealy claims that "the best research projects often arise from some kind of dissonance," so I chose the cases that seemed to suggest a particular dissonance between the brand and other types of organizational identity and that allowed me the most access to various kinds of texts that inscribe the university's decision making processes as well as the various identity-rhetorics that were involved in those processes (MacNealy 128).

The three cases I chose—the university's long range plan, the controversy over a plan to use an area of old-growth forest for a football practice facility ("Stadium Woods"), and the evolution of the brand itself—represent three very different kinds of university decision making and policy-creating activity. The case study of Virginia Tech's long range plan (Chapter 4) analyzes how various rhetorics of organizational identity struggle for the power to shape a document that will guide the university's activity and policies for the next six years. The Stadium Woods case study (Chapter 5) examines the role of organizational identity within a campus controversy, where the rhetorics of identity that initially guided the university's decision making process conflict with the rhetorics of identity that members of the university community believe should drive that process. And, the case of the evolution of the university's brand since its launch (Chapter 6), examines how the identity-rhetorics contained within the brand are produced, reproduced, and changed over time through leadership's authority over the brand and in response to members' perceptions of the organization's identity. This research design provides me with a more comprehensive view of the role of organizational identity

within various types of organizational activity. By speaking with a variety of individuals across the university and collecting data on a variety of situations, I am able to confirm and triangulate my conclusions about the role of and the power relations between the brand and other rhetorics of organizational identity (Doheny-Farina and Odell 515).

Key Informants

Throughout the project, I had access to three individuals from Virginia Tech's Office of University Relations who served as key informants to this dissertation: Larry Hincker, associate vice president for university relations, Melissa Richards, assistant vice president for marketing and publications, and Cecelia Crow, brand marketing manager. A key informant is a "knowledgeable insider" who provides background on the organization and other potential research participants (Weiss 20). These key informants provided me background information about the university's branding initiative and its history through an initial group interview where I also described my project and obtained their support for it. With that support, I was able to more readily attain permission to observe the various Brand Ambassador classes, which are taught by professional communicators throughout the university. Many of those instructors felt more comfortable with my presence and my project, knowing that I had been "vouched for" by my key informants (Weiss 20).

Brand Ambassador Program Participant-Observation

In order to more fully understand the official, leadership-sponsored identity of the university, I participated in and observed the courses offered by the Brand Ambassador Program through the Virginia Tech Faculty Development Institute. These classes begin each fall and are divided into two phases throughout the fall and spring semesters. Phase 1 covers the

broader aspects of the brand, where Phase 2 offers classes specifically about how to implement the brand across different platforms, media, and genres. Those who enroll in the program must complete six of the 13 classes in order to become certified as a Virginia Tech Brand Ambassador (VT, “Brand”). I began my observations in October, 2011, and observed all five classes offered during that semester, which included all classes in Phase 1 of the Brand Ambassador Program—those that discuss the broader aspects of the brand. Then, in the spring semester of 2012, I gathered data from each of the eight Phase 2 courses, which cover implementation of the brand across different platforms, media, and genres. Due to course cancellation and scheduling conflicts, I was only able to participate in two of these courses in person, but most courses had an online session of the course recorded as an Adobe Connect presentation and posted to the “Brand Ambassador Certification” site within Virginia Tech’s course management system. These recordings have the actual audio from the original course, as well as the slides used by the presenters. From these remaining six courses, I was able to download and observe four of them through Adobe Connect presentations, but two of the courses did not offer that option. I was, however, able to obtain the presenter’s slides from these final two courses (see table. 3.1).

As a participant-observer in these classes, my main role was to gather information about how leadership perceived the brand and its role in the organization. I tried to have as little impact as possible on the course itself and its participants. At the beginning of each course in which I participated in person, the instructors allowed me to announce my presence and briefly describe my research and my interest in the Brand Ambassador Program. During this brief announcement (only 1 or 2 minutes long), I emphasized to the participants in the course that my project was approved by Virginia Tech’s Institutional Review Board and that I was there to

Course	In-Person Participant Observation	Observation of Online Course	Presenter's Slides
101 - History of the Brand	X		X
102 - Branding Your Unit	X		X
103 - Planning and Results with the Brand	X		X
104 - Expanding the Brand	X		X
105 - Identity and Style Guide	X		X
201 - Designing for Our Brand	X		
202 - Writing for Our Brand	X		X
203 - Engaging Our Brand in a Web 2.0 World		X	X
204 - Our Brand on the Web		X	X
205 - Competitive Analysis - How Does Your Brand Compare?			X
206 - Multimedia and Our Brand		X	X
207 - Designing for Mobile Applications			X
208 - Diversity and Our Brand		X	X

Table 3.1. Data obtained from Brand Ambassador Program courses.

observe how the course was taught, not their participation or involvement in the course. This announcement served two purposes: 1) to establish my presence and purpose as a researcher in the course and make participants comfortable with that presence, and 2) to conform with the requirements of Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (Doheny-Farina and Odell 513). No such announcements were possible or necessary for the courses from which I was only able to gather electronic data.

During the courses that I observed in person, I took hand-written "jottings" about how the instructors of the courses described the brand, the rules related to its use, and the ways in which instructors and course participants discussed using the brand in their work. These jottings included direct quotes from course instructors and short descriptions of examples they

provided, including several marketing campaigns and publications (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 31). Immediately after the course, usually on the same day, I transposed those hand-written jottings to full fieldnotes of the class, using the jottings to stimulate my own memories of the class. The resulting fieldnotes were detailed descriptions of the course content and conversations that allowed me to more fully understand leadership's official version of the organization's identity, how it has (and can be) used, and how it has changed over time.

Interviews with University Members

While the Brand Ambassador Program served to provide me with a deeper understanding of the official brand of the university, my interviews with various members of the university community provided me with a glimpse into other perceptions of the organization's identity. In addition, these interviews gave me a sense of members' opinions about the official brand. To gather this data, I conducted personal interviews with 20 members of the university. I tried to include a wide variety of perspectives, including various roles and disciplinary homes (see table 3.2). My final participant list included 5 representatives each from the university's faculty, its staff, its graduate students, and its undergraduate students. All participants have been associated with the university for at least two years, but many had been with the university in some capacity for much longer. In selecting participants, I decided that this experience on campus provided more opportunities for my participants to reflect on how their perceptions of the university's identity have changed since they first arrived on campus. This ability to reflect on the university's identity beyond initial perceptions was more valuable to my project than the perspectives of individuals who are new to campus and may not have

developed much of a sense of the university's identity beyond the messages they were exposed to as outsiders.

Participant ID	Type	Rank/Title	College/Division
1	Faculty	Professor	College of Natural Resources and Environment
2	Faculty	Assistant Professor	Office of the Provost - Library
3	Faculty	Associate Professor	College of Engineering
4	Faculty	Associate Professor	College of Natural Resources and Environment
5	Faculty	Professor	College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences
6	Staff	Associate Director	Division of Student Affairs
7	Staff	Co-Director	Office of the Provost
8	Staff	Director	Graduate School
9	Staff	Associate Director	Division of Student Affairs
10	Staff	Office Manager	College of Engineering
11	Undergraduate Student	Junior	College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
12	Undergraduate Student	Junior	Pamplin College of Business
13	Undergraduate Student	Junior	College of Engineering
14	Undergraduate Student	Senior	College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences
15	Undergraduate Student	Senior	College of Architecture and Urban Studies
16	Graduate Student	MS Student	College of Natural Resources and Environment
17	Graduate Student	PhD Student	College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
18	Graduate Student	PhD Candidate	College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences
19	Graduate Student	PhD Student	College of Science
20	Graduate Student	PhD Student	College of Engineering

Table 3.2. Interview participants.

To select participants, I began with members of the university community who were involved with university governance, including Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, the Graduate Student Association, and the Student Government Association. Given their level of involvement in university affairs, these individuals seemed likely to have more defined opinions of the university's identity and more specific examples of situations where that identity had some effect on university practice. Initially, I was concerned that these individuals may be so committed to the university that their perceptions of organizational identity would align too neatly with the brand, but I quickly found that these individuals had some of the strongest opinions about the brand and some of the most passionate descriptions of other versions of organizational identity.

To select additional participants, I followed the snowball sampling technique where I asked each of my participants to suggest additional individuals who may be interested in my study (Weiss 25). Since the purpose of these interviews was simply to provide me with a glimpse of other versions of organizational identity and not necessarily to quantify those perspectives in any way, this initial type of convenience sampling was appropriate. Throughout my interviews, I compiled a list of 112 potential participants through snowball sampling. To select those I invited to participate, however, I attempted to select individuals who would maximize the range of perspectives represented in my sample (Weiss 23). Therefore, I looked for individuals who represented a governance or student organization, department, college, or university division that was not already represented in my sample.

During each interview, I briefly explained the purpose of my study and then followed a modified version of Irving Seidman's three interview series. Because of time and scheduling

constraints, it was not possible to meet for three separate interviews with each participant; however, I followed Seidman's basic structure of beginning with general information about the context of the participant's experience, followed by the details of that experience, and ending with asking participants to reflect on that experience (17). In each interview, I began by asking participants questions about their history at Virginia Tech and why those chose to attend school here or to work here as well as their first impressions of the university. Next, I asked how those impressions have changed and how they would now describe Virginia Tech in a number of situations and contexts. Then, I asked participants to reflect on those answers and describe to me the values and identity of Virginia Tech in their own words and if they have any specific examples that illustrate those identities. Finally, I showed them the university's Brand Platform and asked them to reflect upon it in light of our conversation. I ended each interview by asking the participant if they could think of anyone else within the university community with whom I should speak (see Appendix B for the interview protocol).

Case Study Texts

After selecting the case studies of university-decision making to include in this study, I collected a variety of texts related to each case. In selecting the texts, I focused on those that inscribe or describe the university's decision making process, texts that provide commentary on that process from members of the university community, and texts that provide examples of the ways in which various rhetorics of organizational identity are produced and reproduced by university membership in the cases. Each case resulted in a slightly different corpus of texts, but in all cases, the texts represent the ways in which rhetorics of organizational identity can shape university practice.

For the case of the university's long range plan, I collected several texts available to the university community through the plan's blog. Of course, I collected the final draft of the plan itself and two earlier drafts of that plan. I also collected the various working papers produced by the subcommittees of the Presidential Task Force for the long range plan, and I downloaded each page of the blog itself. These pages included posts made to the blog by members of the task force and staff of the university's Office of Long Range Planning, videos that were included in those posts that explain ideas contained in the plan, and comments made to the blog by various members of the university community.

In the Stadium Woods case, I collected texts produced by various groups of university members who were opposed to the initial decision to destroy part of Stadium Woods in order to build the athletic practice facility. This included several resolutions by university governance bodies, including Faculty Senate, College of Natural Resources and Environment's Faculty Association, Student Government Association, Graduate Student Association, Commission on Student Affairs, and the Blacksburg Town Council, as well as multiple texts produced by Friends of Stadium Woods (FSW), a campus and community organization started by Virginia Tech students and faculty. From FSW, I collected pages from their website explaining the history of the controversy and their opposition to it, posts from their Facebook page, various promotional texts distributed across campus, a YouTube video produced by a Virginia Tech student associated with the group, and my observations of and texts gathered from a rally held to name one of the trees in Stadium Woods after celebrity Stephen Colbert. Additionally, I collected texts related to the university's decision in this case, including the final report from the Athletic Practice Facility Site Evaluation Committee and the final recommendation memo sent by

Sherwood Wilson, the university's vice president for administrative services, to Charles Steger, the university president.

Finally, for the case of the evolution of the brand itself, many of the texts that I analyzed originated from the Brand Ambassador Program. My observations and the slide presentations from those courses provided me with the information I needed to determine the ways in which the brand is produced and reproduced on campus as well as how it has responded to other versions of organizational identity within the university. Additionally, I collected texts from two marketing campaigns that demonstrate ways in which university leadership encourages identification with the brand on campus. From the "Impact" campaign, I gathered seven advertisements that demonstrate the ways the university impacts the Commonwealth of Virginia. And, from the "I invent" campaign, I gathered various promotional materials with the campaign's logo and information about the brand as well as posts from the "Invent the Future" Facebook page, which included photos and quotations from university members who participated in the photo booth events.

Data Analysis

With these data gathered from various sources, I began the analysis stage with the brand itself. By transferring my jottings from the Brand Ambassador Program participant-observations to fully-developed fieldnotes and reading over those fieldnotes several times, I began to understand the pieces of the brand and how leadership interpreted its meaning. From this understanding, I separated the Brand Platform and each of its constituent parts into a

coding scheme of branded identity-rhetorics to use when analyzing the texts from my three cases of university decision making (see Appendix C for the coding scheme).

Second, I had the 20 interviews with various members of the university community transcribed, and I coded them for the identity-rhetorics that participants used when talking about the university and their experiences. During the coding process, I used the coding scheme of branded identity-rhetorics, but I also used a more grounded approach as well, searching for additional identity-rhetorics that participants used in their answers. This aspect of my approach to coding the data is based in grounded theory where my coding categories arose from the data itself, and as the process of coding continued, the coding schemes evolved as I continued to compare “data with data, data with categories, and category with category” (Charmaz 517). After coding the interviews, I had a substantial list of non-branded identity-rhetorics with which my participants identified as members of the university community. From this list and the list of branded identity-rhetorics, I had the beginnings of a coding scheme for the case study texts (see Appendix C).

For each case study, then, I performed a textual analysis of the collected texts, focusing on the identity-rhetorics that support the various arguments within each text. As noted above, depending on the case study, the various texts included those from leadership, which inscribe or describe the university decisions and policies, and those from opposition groups, blog comments, Facebook posts, and marketing campaigns. Throughout this coding process, I used the combined coding scheme I created from the brand and participant interviews, but I also continued to perform some grounded analysis, allowing my coding categories to constantly evolve, based on the data (Charmaz 517). This iterative coding process helped me to continually

see new and different relationships between my various data sets regarding rhetorical strategies, agency, and power (Glaser and Strauss 114). Through this analysis I was able to locate the most powerful identity-rhetorics in each case, based on those that drove the arguments and rationales of decision texts, and how those rhetorics were reified through the various other texts involved in each case as well as in my interviews with university members. In many cases, the most powerful identity-rhetorics were aspects of the university's identity that interview participants had mentioned, which led to further support for the identity-power of those particular rhetorics of identity and to the beginnings of a theory of power relations between various identity-rhetorics within the university.

While the results of this study may not be generalizable to all brands and organizational identities, it is a unique opportunity to learn about the roles of the various rhetorics of organizational identity in the broader activities of a university. From this situated data, I can theorize more fully the connection between organizational identity and strategic activity within an organization. Furthermore, this data allows me to explore the power relations between official brands and other versions of organizational identity as well as the role of agency within identity production and reproduction within a complex organizational setting.

Chapter 4

Planning Virginia Tech's Future

The 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point for how institutions of higher education dealt with the process of change. Prior to this time, change was rarely more than a reaction—a response to some sort of crisis (Kotler & Murphy 471). Over these two decades, however, higher education became increasingly competitive due to increasing accountability and uncertainty about funding and enrollment trends. As a result, colleges and universities needed to begin planning for change through the creation of strategic and long-range plans, which are planning texts that establish organizational priorities, goals, and strategies based on assessments of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and external environments (Kotler & Murphy 471, 476). In short, strategic planning is the collective process of setting a course for the organization and actively planning for the organizational change that is necessary to accomplish its goals, and institutions of higher education are now creating and using these plans on a regular basis.

Virginia Tech is no exception. It creates a new strategic plan every six years in order to continually revise its own path in light of changing internal and external circumstances. In 2011, Virginia Tech began the process of creating its strategic plan for 2012-2018. In this chapter, I analyze various texts related to that process, and I argue that the plan itself enacts powerful identity-rhetorics, which guide the university's future action through identification. First, I discuss the practice of strategic planning in higher education in general, then I explain Virginia Tech's process and the specific texts that allow me to study the identity-rhetorics involved in this case. Next, through analysis of the final version of the plan, various planning documents

used throughout the process, and a blog available for faculty and staff comments on drafts of the plan, I explain which identity-rhetorics had the identity-power necessary to shape the university's plan for the future and how that power was reified by members of the university community. In this case, I find that the university's brand—its official, management sponsored identity—had a significant amount of power to shape the university's plan for the future, and that power was largely deployed through existing, official identity-rhetorics as resources within the university's social structure. These official, branded identity-rhetorics, however, do not all function in the same way within the strategic plan. Some function as straightforward identity claims, but others seem to function as aspirational goals for the university to achieve, meaning that one way the university's official brand drives university practice is through these aspirational identity-rhetorics. Finally, I explore what seems like a direct contradiction between two official identities of the university, one of which has much more influence over the strategic planning process than the other. As a whole, this chapter demonstrates the power of the leadership-sponsored brand of the university to function as a structural resource of identity that both constrains and enables the rhetorical agency of organizational members.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

The concept of strategic planning involves the ability to adapt and respond to changing environments, adverse conditions, and challenging goals (Keller 160). Originally, the term “strategy” was a military concept that corporations began to adopt in the 1960s in order to plan the appropriate actions and resource allocations necessary to achieve their long-term goals within their own unique contexts (Maassen and Potman 398). In fact, strategic planning's

“primary focus is on enhancing institutional adaptation to the external environment”

(Schmidtlein and Milton 4). The resulting initiatives allow an organization “to maintain stability or win a new position amidst a blizzard of discontinuities, unprecedented threats, and surprising changes” (Keller 160). This focus on the external environment is what separates strategic planning from other types of organizational planning activities: “If planning is truly strategic . . . it defines itself in terms of changing realities in the competitive environment. That is the very meaning of "strategic" (Morrill 58).

The adoption of strategic planning practices by institutions of higher education was a direct result of those changing realities. In the 1970s, the “United States entered a new era of massive and widespread social, economic, demographic, and technological change and new international competition” (Keller 160). The external factors affecting higher education included an increased environment of competition for financial resources, declining public confidence in the institution of higher education itself, which led to increased requirements for accountability at the federal and state levels, the prospect of a reduced pool of traditional-age college students due to declining birth rates, and continually advancing technologies like the personal computer and satellite communication (Keller 160; Morrill 56; Welsh, Nunez, and Petrosko 693; Schmidtlein and Milton 1).

All these factors signaled a close to the “long cycle of growth and prosperity in American higher education” by the end of the 1970s (Morrill 56). As a result, many in higher education turned to the management philosophies of corporations in order to ensure their institutions’ survival, including the practices of strategic planning (Schmidtlein and Milton 1). The late 1970s and 1980s, therefore, were the decades of strategic planning’s emergence in higher education

(Morrill xii). Strategic planning had become what Shuck called “the new ‘religion’ of higher education, and that devotion continues into the 21st century (qtd. in Schmidlein and Milton 1). In fact, the accrediting agency for Virginia Tech, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges, requires explicit strategic planning as part of its accreditation requirements. The 2012 edition of the “Principles of Accreditation” requires that

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. (Southern 18)

Such a commitment to strategic planning says that many within institutions of higher education (and within those institutions that hold universities accountable) believe it works. They see the strategic planning process as a purposeful one within the university—providing guidance for the organization and its leadership in terms of what it wants to accomplish over time. Based on the organization’s unique strengths, resources, and opportunities, a strategic plan allows an organization to plan how to reach its unique goals, make consistent and goal-oriented decisions along the way, and create a goal-centered assessment and evaluation process at the end of the plan’s term (Kotler and Murphy 476-478).

The strategic planning process can be broken down into four steps: “(1) scanning the external environment for possible threats and opportunities, (2) assessing internal strengths and weaknesses, (3) analyzing the external and internal information, and (4) identifying major directions that will promote institutional health and viability” (Schmidlein and Milton 4). Once

the plan is complete, it represents “‘what we are and what we hope to be’, i.e. our strategic directions in relation to the environment,” and throughout the plan’s term, it “give[s] direction to, and act[s] as constraints on, all subsequent decision making and goal-directed activity within the institution” (Shirley 93). In other words, the strategic plan, the goals created, and the decisions made during the planning process “provide unity and direction to all organizational activities” (Shirley 93).

Many faculty and administrators, on the other hand, believe that corporate practices like strategic planning are incompatible with traditional academic values (Schmidtlein and Milton 2). These practices “often resonate suspiciously with the language of marketing and commerce,” which many in higher education associate with what has become known as the corporate university (Morrill 55). Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt claim that one definition of the corporate university is an institution that adopts corporate management techniques (89). They claim that the increase in corporate management and accounting practices is creating institutions that are driven by administrators, rather than faculty (Nelson and Watt 91). Furthermore, opponents of corporate planning practices in general claim that the documents more than likely end up “on the shelf,” rather than actively driving the university’s decision making process (Schmidtlein and Milton 15).

For these reasons, university strategic plans must be somewhat different from corporate, military, and political plans. The processes and models from these domains are not easily transferrable to higher education (Keller 162). Strategic plans for institutions of higher education have a dual obligation: to traditional academic values and to the financial health and viability of the organization (Morrill 65). To accomplish this dual purpose, most institutions rely

on a combination of strong leadership and informed faculty input (Keller 163). The planning process, therefore, seems much more democratized within higher education than it is within the corporate sector (Kotler & Murphy 472-473).

In this more democratic planning environment, success hinges on the ability of the planners to get buy-in from the rest of campus (Keller 163). This means involving the rest of campus in the planning process and achieving a state of consubstantiality through identification. Of course, complete consensus is impossible. There are too many perspectives about who the university is and what it should be doing, but some agreement about the organization's goals and support for the planning process among deans, department heads, administrators, and governance officials is absolutely vital (Keller 165). Beyond the involvement of faculty in the planning process, one other way to increase support of strategic planning initiatives is to ensure transparent and successful communication about that process. In order to get the necessary buy-in from campus constituencies, planners must "capture their attention and hold it" (Keller 165). With that attention, those involved in the planning process must tell the rest of the organization about the external context to which the university is responding, the details about the planning process, and the outcomes of that process (Welsh, Nunez, and Petrosko 703).

Essentially, these communication efforts are a rhetorical move toward identification. By sharing the plan and the process, planners are encouraging other members of the university to adopt the organizational identity represented by the plan. Strategic plans, after all, are very much about organizational identity: "It makes perfect sense to ask of participants in organizations, 'What matters decisively to this institution?' Questions of this sort trigger the

process of self-discovery and the articulation of organizational identity, which is the birthplace for the work of strategy” (Morrill 42). Strategic plans articulate “who we are and what we intend to do in a collective sense” (Shirley 97). By creating and enacting strategic plans, universities make claims about their values, their identities, and their aspirations. Strategic plans “represent shared and institutionalized value commitments that finally must be enacted through the agency of individuals” (Morrill 42). In other words, the values, identities, and aspirations represented by strategic plans mean little if not translated into action by individual members of the organization. In the end, that final translation into organizational action is key, but it is driven by the planning process, which involves organizational commitments to certain values, identities, and aspirations. To successfully create a collective plan, however, requires that those involved in the process have similar perceptions of the organization’s identity, and that process of planning through collective identification is the focus of this chapter.

Strategic Planning at Virginia Tech

In early 2011, Virginia Tech began the process of creating the 2012-2018 strategic plan for the university. President Charles Steger appointed a variety of faculty, staff, administrators and students to a Presidential Task Force, coordinated by Paul Knox, executive director of the university’s Office of Long Range Planning. Task Force members were selected from lists provided by vice presidents and deans across the university, and, in the spring semester of 2011, they were divided into five subcommittees: the Global Engagement and Competitiveness subcommittee; the Innovation in Pedagogy and Curricula subcommittee; the Organizational Structure and Flexibility subcommittee; the Strengths, Synergies, and Innovations

subcommittee; and the Virginia Tech Experience subcommittee. In keeping with strategic planning's focus on the external conditions that may affect the organization, these subcommittees were charged with exploring the challenges and opportunities that Virginia Tech may face over the next six years within their areas of concern. Each subcommittee summarized their findings in working paper drafts submitted to the Office of Long Range Planning, the rest of the task force, and the university community via a publicly accessible long range planning blog. The blog allowed interested members of the university community to read and comment on the plan throughout each stage of its development, creating what the Office of Long Range Planning calls an "iterative process" of developing the strategic plan. A central question emerged from these initial working paper drafts: "How can the university best position itself to continue to cultivate and sustain a *Culture of Excellence*?"

This central question inspired a reorganization of the task force in the fall semester of 2011 into five different subcommittees, each focused on this concept of fostering a culture of excellence across Virginia Tech's areas of impact: the subcommittee for Envisioning Excellence, the subcommittee for Tomorrow's Leaders, the subcommittee for Tomorrow's Scholars, the subcommittee for Tomorrow's Knowledge, and the subcommittee for Tomorrow's University. These subcommittees were tasked with exploring challenges and opportunities, but they were also asked to begin developing strategic responses to those challenges and opportunities. Again, each subcommittee presented drafts of working papers to the Office of Long Range Planning, the rest of the task force, and the long range planning blog.

In late 2011 and early 2012, those working papers were combined into full drafts of the entire strategic plan, titled *A Plan for a New Horizon: Envisioning Virginia Tech 2012-2018*,

which were also made available for public comment on the long range planning blog. These drafts focused on responding to four challenges—which arose from the working paper drafts—that Virginia Tech will face in the next six years: “The plan for 2012-2018 is guided by four structuring challenges that impact the entire university: the implications of global interdependence; the challenges of a data-driven society; meeting our research expectations; and the continuing need to focus on organizational efficiency and flexibility” (VT, *A Plan* 3). Besides detailing these challenges, the drafts of the plan suggest responses to those challenges—including strategic actions that the university must take—across the three broad categories of research and innovation, the life of the mind, and the Virginia Tech experience.

In order to determine the role of organizational identity and branding in this process of strategic planning at Virginia Tech and to examine the nature of the power relations between the brand and other versions of organizational identity, my methods are focused on textual analysis of the various texts produced by the process. I gathered copies of working paper drafts from each subcommittee, drafts of the final plan, blog posts from the subcommittees and the Office of Long Range Planning, and comments made to those blog posts and drafts by members of the university community. From analysis of these texts, I determine which identity-rhetorics had the most identity-power to shape the final version of the plan and the power relations involved in their enactment.

The identity-rhetorics involved in the process of creating the strategic plan largely include rhetorics that reflect the official brand of the university, demonstrating the influence of the brand on the organization’s culture and practice. More important, however, is the role that these identity-rhetorics play for the university. While these branded identity-rhetorics seem to

have guided the Presidential Task Force toward emphasizing the official identity in the strategic planning process, certain aspects of the brand seem to function as aspirational identities for the university. The brand itself treats them as realistic aspects of what the university is, but in the strategic plan (and in the minds of many members of the university community), they are goals of what the university wants to be. These aspirational identity-rhetorics, then, are one way that organizational identity directly drives organizational practice. Finally, there is one powerful identity-rhetoric within the strategic planning process—that of the university as a science and engineering school—that seems to contradict the university’s official position as a comprehensive university, and this contradiction demonstrates how various versions of organizational identity can coexist within an organization and perform different types of rhetorical work for the organization and its members within different rhetorical situations.

The Brand as Structural Resource

As shown in Chapter 2, rhetorics of identity are a type of structural resource that organizational agents draw upon as they act on behalf of the organization. According to Giddens’ theory of structuration, social systems—like nations, organizations, or even neighborhoods—exist as patterns of shared social practices (Giddens 185). These patterns are based on principles that the members of social systems produce and reproduce as true and appropriate for their shared purposes (Sewell 6). These principles compose what Giddens refers to as social structures—the rules and resources that serve as the basis of social practice within social systems (Giddens 185). Within these structures, resources are the principles or “properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the

course of interaction” (Giddens 16). In other words, agents within social systems accomplish their own goals (and those of the system) by drawing upon the resources provided to them within the social structure.

As structural resources, identity-rhetorics obviously include the official version of an organization’s identity—the brand. As a leadership-sponsored version of identity, the brand has undeniable influence. It is a resource within the social structure that “privilege[s] particular definitions of organizational reality, legitimating and reifying these formulations and in so doing conveying power on those whose interests they serve” (Witten 104). One of the questions that drives this dissertation, though, is whether there is room for other interpretations of the organization’s identity in that structure. Do other members of the university have the power to affect organizational practice through the processes of identification and consubstantiation? As this section will demonstrate, the strategic planning process at Virginia Tech seems to have been dominated by official, brand-related identity-rhetorics. Therefore, the brand acted as a structural resource that the Presidential Task Force (and others who commented on drafts of the plan) drew upon and reproduced in their creation of the 2012-2018 strategic plan for the university. Specifically, the final version of the strategic plan reproduced the branded identity-rhetorics of research and the Brand Promise of “quality, innovation, and results.”

A Research University

Virginia Tech is a research university. Few people (if any) will argue that point. It is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a research university with very high research activity, and in 2012, it was ranked number 41 in research expenditures by the National Science Foundation, with more than \$450 million in research spending during

the 2011 fiscal year (Pastor). My interviews with members of the university community show that the university's emphasis on research is a defining characteristic of the institution. When asked to summarize the university's identity, most participants immediately mentioned that it is a research-focused university. One staff member said, "I do think of us as a research school. I don't feel like there's anything more important that happens here than the research agenda and bringing in funding and grant dollars."

This participant's comment is supported by the university's last strategic plan (for 2006-2012), which set a goal for Virginia Tech to become one of the nation's top research universities. It is not specific about rankings, but since then, the university has continued to take actions to increase its research portfolio. For instance, in 2007, Virginia Tech began the process of opening a medical school and research institute in collaboration with Carilion Clinic. The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute opened in 2010, becoming the university's sixth research institute. With the addition of the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology, Virginia Tech now has seven research institutes that have helped Virginia Tech increase its research expenditures by more than \$160 million and move from a rank of 56 in the nation to a rank of 41 (NSF 2; Pastor). As the research identity-rhetoric continues to gain power within the university community, members of the university continue to enact that identity through strategies and practices that support it and reproduce it. The medical school, while fulfilling a valid need in southwest Virginia, also works to secure Virginia Tech's position as a research university because most highly regarded research universities have medical schools, helping them draw in health-related research funds. And, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the relationship between identity and action is not linear. Identity shapes organizational activity

through identification, but an organization's activity also informs its identity (see fig. 2.2). So, as Virginia Tech continues to take actions that support its identity as a research university, like opening the medical school, it continues to reproduce and strengthen that identity-rhetoric within the cultural and social discourses of the university, and the 2012-2018 strategic plan reproduces that identity-rhetoric again by specifically targeting a growth of research expenditures to \$680 million by 2018 (VT, *A Plan* 11). Furthermore, enacting the research identity-rhetoric in the strategic plan does more than simply reproduce that identity-rhetoric; it also authorizes the action and expenditures necessary to ensure its reproduction.

Research, therefore, is obviously an integral part of Virginia Tech's identity. It's the first thing mentioned in the Brand Platform's Positioning Statement—"Virginia Tech is a high-performing research university..."—and it is also mentioned two other times in the platform. The Positioning Statement says that the university offers "open boundaries of study and research," and the second Brand Driver is "Groundbreaking research and eminent scholarship" (see fig. 3.1). The 2012-2018 strategic plan for the university echoes this concentration on research and scholarship. In fact, variations on the words "research" and "scholarship"—including "scholarly" and "researchers"—appear in the 18-page final draft of the strategic plan 76 times.

The plan also draws on the discourse of research universities in terms of its academic mission. It discusses undergraduate research as a path to providing those students with "real-world" experience in applying the lessons they learn in coursework, and one specific goal of the plan is to "increase undergraduate involvement in meaningful research experiences and experiential learning opportunities by adopting a 'hands-on, minds-on' philosophy that

promotes connecting real-life experience with academic concepts” (VT, *A Plan* 15). However, the plan puts much more emphasis on graduate student education, research, and scholarship. It proposes specific efforts that “will create more research opportunities for faculty and students, improve Ph.D. student recruitment, increase Ph.D. production, and enhance our curricular breadth and teaching quality” (VT, *A Plan* 10). Specifically, the plan sets a goal for increasing graduate student enrollment by 1,000 students, which is expected to “provide additional teaching resources, sustain and expand our research portfolio, and provide a broad range of student research experiences” (VT, *A Plan* 2, 11).

Several of my interview participants, however, expressed concern about this intense focus on research. They seem to believe that research is being emphasized at the expense of other aspects of the university’s mission. One undergraduate student from agriculture said, “Some professors I know are here for research and they don’t care about teaching, but they have to teach.” A graduate student from the social sciences echoed this concern: “When I think about what is valued, I think research is valued. I think one thing that I don’t hear very valued is teaching.” And, a faculty member from natural resources claimed that the university’s focus on becoming a top 50 research university overshadowed all other aspects of the university’s mission when it came to hiring new faculty members and evaluating programs. These concerns, while valid, still emphasize the university’s identity as a research-focused institution. Regardless of these individuals’ opinions on the appropriateness of this focus, they all agree that Virginia Tech is a research university.

In terms of powerful identity-rhetorics that shaped the 2012-2018 strategic plan, research seems to be one of the most powerful. Because it is so imbedded in the university’s

culture and mission, it is one of the most influential aspects of the university's identity. The brand has made the research university identity such a part of the university's culture that members of the Presidential Task Force accept it is a natural part of the university's identity. Therefore, they willingly chose to reproduce that identity-rhetoric in the process of creating the plan. Gerard Hauser says that "our cultural identity is pre-given by the language, customs, and institutions that we share. These are imbedded with affiliations, significant events, and disposition to respond to the world in certain ways. They tell us who we are and why we believe as we do" (*Vernacular* 118). This example shows that the identities embedded in our organizational cultures are only pre-given because they are continually reproduced through organizational rhetoric and organizational action. In other words, the research identity of the university is a result of the cycle of identity production and reproduction that takes place through rhetoric, identification, and collective action. Therefore, it has become so embedded in the organization's culture that it is now a structural resource that constrains the activity of organizational members to the point that its prominence in the strategic plan was a virtual requirement.

The Brand Promise

The university's Brand Promise took a similarly prominent role in the plan. As part of Virginia Tech's Brand Platform, the Brand Promise is the core of what the university pledges to deliver to its many constituents, both internal and external. The Brand Promise consists of three words: "quality, innovation, and results." These three words seem to drive much of the university's planning process. In fact, the 2006 strategic plan, which would have been released around the same time as the university's new brand launched in February of 2006, was titled

“Inventing the Future: Quality, Innovation, and Results.” The 2012-2018 strategic plan is also dominated by this particular use of language. In the 18-page final plan document, some version of the phrase “quality, innovation, and results” appears five times. Individually, the words appear even more often. The word “results” appears six times throughout the document; “quality” appears 17 times. And, some variation on the word “innovation”—including “innovative”—appears 25 times in the 18-page document.

The usage of this branded language focuses not only on the quality, innovation, and results of the university’s research and academic programs, but also on the university’s administrative capacity to effectively support those programs. For example, the final plan states, “From an academic perspective, ensuring quality, innovation, and results will also benefit from an intentional process designed to explore, evaluate, and act upon new or unanticipated areas of scholarship or emerging world problems” (VT, *A Plan* 6). And, in order to support that kind of program and scholarship development, the university plans to “create and support environments for its educational and research programs that support innovative, high-quality, and high-impact outcomes,” which they intend to do “by reviewing and revising our current business practices for opportunities to optimize efficiency, flexibility, and accountability without sacrificing our ability to remain innovative and competitive” (VT, *A Plan* 10, 7).

Interviews with various members of the university community seem to support the sentiment behind this aspect of the plan. For example, one faculty member from the library specifically mentioned the university’s Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy as an example of the university’s commitment to quality, innovative programs that produce results. According to this faculty member, the success—and rapid growth—of the conference over the

last several years is due to the university's willingness to financially support unique ideas and programs: "The central university was willing to incentivize people who had good ideas, and I think that is a willingness on the part of the administration to say, 'come up with something that sounds good, different, and plausible, and we will allot some extra resources for you to do it.'" When asked about the Brand Promise, many other interview participants agreed that the university was innovative, particularly in terms of the research produced by its faculty. Among specific examples participants provided were the Robotics & Mechanisms Laboratory (RoMeLa) in the Mechanical Engineering Department, the Lumenhaus—an award-winning, solar-powered house designed and built by an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students at Virginia Tech—and System X (also known as "Big Mac"), an Apple Power Mac G5-based supercomputer built by Advanced Research Computing at Virginia Tech in 2003.

The preponderance of the Brand Promise within the strategic plan and among interview participants leads me to the conclusion that this aspect of the brand has been integrated into the university's culture and social structure. Similar to the research identity, the Brand Promise has become a resource within that social structure that constrains the activities of university members to some degree. Specifically, members of the university community who participated in the strategic planning process (in 2006 as well as in 2012) made the rhetorical decision to reproduce the language of the Brand Promise, possibly in order to draw upon its established identity-power as part of the official brand of the university, which lends power and ethos to the strategic plan itself as a decision making and policy-creating text.

Both of these identity-rhetorics (research and the Brand Promise), as resources within the university's social structure, lead agents to reproduce the official, leadership sponsored

brand of the university through the 2012-2018 strategic plan. A graduate student interview participant from natural resources said, “Most of what we consider to be our cultural identity at this university didn’t come from us. It came from above; it wasn’t that we developed this community that had these ideals and then went forth in the world. It was from top down. We were sort of told, all right, this is what we’re going to do now, and we just all sort of follow along. And here we are.” From this perspective, the brand is a constraining aspect of the university’s culture and social structure. According to Jim Henry, organizational members are “strongly subjugated” by these types of organizational discourses and structures (Henry 214). And, in drawing upon these resources, we reproduce the very social structures that constrain us. However, the next section demonstrates how such constraining social structures are not always a bad thing. In fact, in keeping with Giddens’ concept of the duality of structure, structures like the brand that constrain activity also enable agency.

The Brand as Aspirational Identity-Rhetoric

As discussed in Chapter 1, brands are purposefully created by organizational leaders in order to unite an organization’s messages and to create a unified identity and purpose for the organization. In short, brands reflect how leadership wants the organization to be viewed. Some parts of the brand, therefore, may have been strategically created by leadership in order to encourage top-down identification with a specific, leadership-sponsored identity-rhetoric with which members of the university community did not already identify with on a large scale. This type of strategic identity creation is the topic of one of Faber’s case studies in his *Community Action and Organizational Change*. As a consultant for the MacKenzie College,

Faber determined that students in the college's massage school were dissatisfied because they were reacting to what they perceived as an uncaring environment, based on narratives of heavy "course loads, [high] teacher expectations, administrative blunders, and an unruly public" (*Community* 90). Furthermore, the way the students talked about these problems continued to reproduce these narratives and make the situation seem even more hopeless. In order to combat these issues, Faber and college administrators created new narratives for MacKenzie. They created a student handbook that prepared students for the program and its expectations, outlined faculty and staff responsibilities, and established protections for the emotional and physical well-being of students (Faber, *Community* 91). Over time, this handbook helped to create a new organizational culture at MacKenzie, replacing the formerly uncaring narratives with new narratives of responsibility and transparency. Faber and college administrators had successfully altered the college's identity by creating a text with which faculty, staff, and students eventually all identified.

With time, identity-rhetorics like these narratives become naturalized as part of the organization's culture, and they begin to drive organizational decision making processes (Waymer 220). They construct the realities of our workplaces and guide our decisions (Perkins and Blyler 21). It seems reasonable, then, that organizations would use branded identity statements, mission statements, and other similar genres to strategically move the organization's culture in a specific direction. Identity statements like this have been called identity aspirations—a type of identity statement produced by management that states "what we would like our organization to be" (Lerpold et al. 6). Creating identity aspirations as part of an official brand allows the organization to "re-focus attention, change priorities, revise

corporate policies and practices, and justify changes” (Lerpold et al. 7-8). They can also “change the way an organization is perceived by and represented to its external [and internal] audiences” (Lerpold et al. 8). Using identity-rhetorics in this way sounds somewhat manipulative, and the possibility exists, as with any type of rhetorical move, that it can be used to exert control. But, in this particular case of strategic planning at Virginia Tech, three aspirational identity-rhetorics seem to be working to better the organization and enable agents within the social structure to commit university resources to reaching those aspirations, including efforts to increase awareness of cultural and diversity issues on campus, to make Virginia Tech a leader in digital education, and to encourage interdisciplinarity and collaboration.

Diversity and Cultural Inclusion

The Positioning Statement in Virginia Tech’s Brand Platform states that the university is a “culturally inclusive learning community,” and the university’s Board of Visitors adopted the “Virginia Tech Principles of Community” in 2005, which include five affirmations that represent the university’s “on-going efforts to increase access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members” (“Virginia Tech”) Both the brand and the Principles of Community demonstrate the university’s commitment to cultural inclusiveness and support for diversity initiatives on campus; however, many within the university community feel that Virginia Tech still has work to do in this area.

Out of my 20 interviews with faculty, staff, and students, 12 of them were struck by the brand’s position on cultural inclusiveness. In some way, each of them said that while Virginia Tech as an institution may value diversity and cultural inclusiveness, it has a long way to go

before it is a reality on campus. Some focused on diversity of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Others discussed gender and sexual orientation, and still others mentioned diversity issues related to socioeconomic status, political ideology, and even regional differences. When asked to comment on the Brand Platform, several of them (notably two individuals from minority groups) explicitly said that they would “get rid of,” “place a line through,” or somehow delete the “culturally inclusive” phrase in the Positioning Statement. One African-American participant—a graduate student from agriculture—explicitly said, “When I first got here, some of the experiences that I had multi-culturally were disheartening.” Most participants agree that Virginia Tech has made great strides in this area, but it continues to be an issue of concern. One faculty member from natural resources put it this way: “I think we say we value diversity. And I think we’re really trying on that front. We are in southwest Virginia. We may never be as diverse as we hope to be, but I think that there are definite resources being put into that and there’s sincere desire to increase diversity.”

The 2012-2018 strategic plan echoes these concerns through the identity-rhetorics of an institution that values diversity and cultural inclusiveness. Specifically, the plan uses a narrative of an increasingly intercultural world to encourage intercultural education and research initiatives, and it draws on the discourse of cultural acceptance to propose ways to “continue to expand our efforts to foster diversity and inclusion” (VT, *A Plan* 16). The plan specifically states that “international engagement is becoming an imperative for higher education, given the pace of globalization and the flow of people and ideas across geographical borders,” and it emphasizes the “increasingly collaborative nature of research as well as the amplified emphasis on data-sharing at the national and supranational levels” (VT, *A Plan* 3, 10). Based on this

narrative of an increasingly global environment, the plan seeks to make study-abroad and other opportunities for international engagement available for as many students as possible (VT, *A Plan 4*).

Additionally, the plan draws on discourses of cultural acceptance to propose ways to make the campus itself more culturally inclusive, with a particular focus on international students. The plan claims that “we cannot be a vibrant community without promoting caring and inclusiveness, respecting individuality, and valuing the unique contributions of each of our members” (VT, *A Plan 16*). Through this discourse of inclusiveness, the plan states that the university “will continue to pursue the local-global connections that join our resident international students with domestic students to create a diverse intercultural campus environment” (VT, *A Plan 4*).

Based on the significant concerns expressed by interview participants, these identity-rhetorics of diversity and inclusion seem to act as aspirational identity-rhetorics that are attempting to change the way organizational members think about diversity concerns on campus in order to affect the organization’s practices. The university’s actual identity related to issues of diversity and inclusion seems to be one of a university that is striving to be better. Most of my interview participants would probably agree with that assessment, and that identity seems to align with how the strategic plan treats issues of diversity and inclusion. It continually uses words like “strive” and “continue” to signify an on-going effort. The brand may word it as a reality that the university has already achieved, but individuals within the university community know that it is a work in progress. They view it as an aspirational identity, and it has been incorporated into the university social structure as such. That aspirational rhetoric of cultural

inclusiveness—as an existing structural resource—is what the Presidential Task Force drew upon in the strategic plan, much like the Brand Promise and the rhetoric of research. In doing so, they reproduced that aspirational identity in the plan itself. As opposed to acting as a constraining resource of the social structure, it acts as an enabling resource that members of the task force choose to deploy as they consider the rhetorical situation of the plan and the state of diversity concerns on campus. Through this rhetorical choice of resources, they exercise their own agency to affect the course of the institution by suggesting specific ways that the university can continue developing that aspect of its identity. If the university acts upon those recommendations, then the cycle of identification, consubstantiation, and collective action will be complete. Those actions, then, will continue to reproduce the identity-rhetoric of cultural inclusiveness within the university’s cultural and social discourses, and the cycle can continue to create further identifications and more organizational practice to make this aspirational identity-rhetoric a reality for the organization.

Technological Leadership

Another part of the university’s official brand is its emphasis on technology. The Positioning Statement includes a phrase that claims Virginia Tech is a “technologically creative...learning community,” and one Brand Driver claims that Virginia Tech is driven by providing “technological leadership.” In fact, Virginia Tech’s very name emphasizes its focus on technological and scientific development, and the university has asked faculty and staff to use the name “Virginia Tech” as their affiliation in publications and presentations, which implies an effort to link our identity with other high-tech universities like Georgia Tech and Cal Tech.

Surprisingly, though, several interview participants disputed to some degree that Virginia Tech is a leader in technology or creative in its application or development. They suggested that while Virginia Tech may be technologically creative or advanced in some areas, it is not a characteristic of the entire campus. Two individuals half-jokingly talked about the university's telephone system, which is a decades-old system in dire need of updating. One staff member said, "I'm forever laughing at Virginia Tech because you know Blacksburg is the global electronic village and we are a tech school, but yet, you know this is the same phone system we had when we were undergrads." On a more serious note, a graduate student from the sciences (who also attended Virginia Tech for his undergraduate degree) brought up concerns about Virginia Tech's Math Emporium, a massive computer lab where several self-paced, online courses in mathematics are administered. The student acknowledged that the Math Emporium is innovative and technologically advanced because "it provides a large scale service to a number of students at a cost effective manner," but pedagogically, he questions whether freshman are really ready to self-pace a course like that: "They are freshmen. They're coming into a new environment and psychologically, they're ready to do something completely on their own? I think it's a huge mess." A staff member summarized well what seems to be the sentiment expressed by many interview participants: "Technological leadership, I don't know about that, I think we have technology and we would love to be leaders. I'm not exposed to technological leadership."

Much of the strategic plan mentions ways that Virginia Tech needs to leverage its technological capacity to expand approaches to technologically-assisted learning, such as online classes, and to ensure that all graduates of Virginia Tech are well-prepared to function in an

increasingly digital society. By drawing on the discourses of online courses and distance learning that so dominate the current landscape of higher education, the plan sets up an organizational responsibility to take a pioneering role in the development and advancement of online education. The following paragraph effectively summarizes the plan's approach to this goal:

Through the continued development of our online and hybrid courses, we will continue to explore and embrace sound pedagogy through a combination of active and engaged learning and appropriately matched technological tools . . . We will also continue to provide professional-development opportunities to ensure that faculty members have the skills and conceptual frameworks necessary to use technology to provide meaningful student-to-student and student-to- faculty interaction, active learning opportunities, and timely and constructive feedback. (VT, *A Plan* 14-15).

By using the phrases like “continued development” and “continue to provide,” this paragraph emphasizes the aspirational character of the technological leadership identity-rhetoric. Virginia Tech has already taken actions to address these needs, such as the creation of the Institute for Distance and Distributed Learning and the Faculty Development Institute, which provide resources for online teaching and technology training and development, but the plan reproduces this identity as a continuing goal.

Also, the plan creates a narrative of an increasingly complex world that relies on computational thinking and digital literacy, and as a technological leader, Virginia Tech has a responsibility to provide its students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in that world. During this “increasingly digital age,” the plan claims that students need to “understand the

economic, social, and cultural implications of social networking, mobile and cloud computing, and new information and media ecosystems” (VT, *A Plan* 4). With that in mind, the plan declares that Virginia Tech will evaluate and update the university’s general education program—the Curriculum for Liberal Education—to include “computational thinking and informatics/digital fluency as basic skills for all students” (VT, *A Plan* 14).

Again, these goals established by the strategic plan draw on the technologically-related aspects of the university’s official identity. Surprisingly many members of the university seem to have reservations about the university’s claim of technological leadership, but they all admit that it is a goal of the university’s. In other words, it is an aspirational identity-rhetoric, much like the rhetorics of diversity and inclusion. The Presidential Task Force made the rhetorical choice to enact the aspirational identity of technological leadership to suggest specific ways in which Virginia Tech can achieve that goal—by further exploring best practices and technologies for online education and by incorporating digital fluency and computational thinking in the general education curriculum. And, if the university acts on these recommendations, then the identity-rhetoric of technological leadership will continue to be reproduced through they cycle of identification and organizational practice.

Interdisciplinarity

Finally, the Positioning Statement of the Brand Platform claims that Virginia Tech has “open boundaries of study and research” that work to “positively transform lives and communities.” While somewhat vague, that statement suggests that Virginia Tech does not place restrictions on how and what their faculty and students can study and research. Most interview participants who commented on that aspect of the brand interpreted it as a

reference to interdisciplinarity and collaboration. And, many of them said that while interdisciplinary work may happen at Virginia Tech, there is little administrative support for interdisciplinary work and no explicit way to recognize such work in the process of tenure and promotion. One faculty member from the humanities stated that “the open boundaries of study and research I think suggests that . . . interdisciplinary is more of a reality than it seems to be . . . because we say that we value it, but we don’t have an administrative structure that facilitates it. So we value it if you want to pay for it out of your own hide so to speak.” Another faculty member from natural resources noted that this is not just a problem at Virginia Tech: “There are some real serious barriers at any university, so it’s not just Virginia Tech, to really doing interdisciplinary research well. And part of it really comes back to how you count things when it comes to tenure.” When talking about interdisciplinary research, a graduate student from natural resources said, “I don’t know how true that is in most cases. It feels a little bit false to me. But I think that’s the identity people are trying to create for Virginia Tech.”

That seems to be the key to all of these aspirational identity-rhetorics. They are identities that Virginia Tech is trying to create for itself, and the strategic plan echoes the university’s desire to enhance its identity in terms of interdisciplinarity and collaboration by promoting a growth of administrative support and incentives for such activities, what the plan calls a “culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development” (VT, *A Plan* 13). The plan encourages the dissolution of “unnecessary barriers” to this work, and dedicates the university to providing “appropriate infrastructure, administrative support, and opportunities for collaboration, and the time and freedom to create, apply, and communicate new knowledge” (VT, *A Plan* 10-11). It even goes as far as to suggest certain interdisciplinary

partnerships that build on the university's existing strengths: "The integration of business with programs in science, engineering, and medicine creates the opportunity for radical innovation" (VT, *A Plan 2*). The plan also recommends the growth of interdisciplinary graduate programs as a way to incorporate interdisciplinarity into the university's culture: "We will facilitate the development of new and innovative graduate programs that build on interdisciplinary strengths, both existing (e.g., the Genetics, Bioinformatics, and Computational Biology Program) and emerging (e.g., health sciences)" (VT, *A Plan 11*). Furthermore, it suggests that the current architecture and design program is a model for "the power of transdisciplinary synergy" (VT, *A Plan 3*). These programmatic specifics show that there is some interdisciplinary work happening at Virginia Tech, but the plan reproduces that part of the university's identity as aspirational in order to encourage more support of that work.

Several faculty who commented on the strategic plan's blog noted that interdisciplinary collaboration was an identity of the university with which they identified. One commenter wrote "My experience at Virginia Tech is that [interdisciplinary collaboration] is one of our strengths as an institution in comparison to our peers, and that faculty members who are intellectually engaged seek out cooperation/collaboration as a natural part of the investigative process." And another commenter, writing on behalf of the faculty of the Department of Human Development, acknowledged the rise of interdisciplinary programs on campus. These comments demonstrate that interdisciplinary collaboration is a powerful identity of the university—one with which many identify. However, in discussing this particular section of the strategic plan, one faculty interview participant noted that "I think that open boundary in study and research is really a big challenge because it's easier said than done. But I think it's honestly

what we're trying to do." As a member of the Presidential Task Force, she recognizes that the "open boundaries" aspect of the university's identity could be stronger. It is a reality to a degree, but it is also an aspiration. And that aspiration itself is also an aspect of the university's identity. As a member of the task force and an agent within the university's structure, she supports that identity and its reproduction within the plan.

Like the other aspirational identity-rhetorics of technological leadership and diversity and inclusion, members of the task force selected these existing resources within the social structure of the university in order to gain the power necessary to affect the university's future, which largely reproduces the official brand of the institution, but it does so by making clear that some of those identity-rhetorics are aspirational in nature. By making these identity-rhetorics aspirational, they became agents within the social system because they used the available resources to "make a difference" in the course of the organization (Giddens 15). They reproduce the brand, but in so doing, they acknowledge that while the university is taking some actions to reach these goals, it still has work to do. And, over time, as the university takes the actions recommended by the plan, the cycle of identification and organizational practice will continue to reproduce these identity-rhetorics until they reach a higher level of consubstantiality. Therefore, these aspirational identity-rhetorics within the strategic plan show how members of the task force were able to use the structural resources of the brand—and its inherent identity-power—to enable their own agency to make a difference within the organization.

Contradicting Identity-Rhetorics

A final identity-rhetoric involved in the 2012-2018 strategic plan centers on the scope of Virginia Tech's programs. One version of this identity is that Virginia Tech is a comprehensive university. Comprehensive universities offer programs across the disciplinary spectrum, including liberal arts, humanities, science, engineering, and professional programs. For this reason, Virginia Tech is classified by The Carnegie Foundation as a "Balanced Arts & Sciences/Professions" university at the undergraduate level (Carnegie). Furthermore, it is also classified as a university with a high coexistence of graduate programs, which means that at least half of the graduate programs within the university coexist with undergraduate programs in the same discipline (Carnegie). By this definition, then, Virginia Tech is, at least at the undergraduate level, a comprehensive university. While the words "comprehensive university" do not appear in the Brand Platform itself, many news stories and marketing materials produced by Virginia Tech end with a paragraph that includes this sentence: "As the commonwealth's most comprehensive university and its leading research institution, Virginia Tech offers 215 undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 30,000 students and manages a research portfolio of \$450 million" (Whaley). The university administration, therefore, obviously identifies Virginia Tech as a comprehensive university.

However, that identity seems to conflict with the ways that interview participants identify with the university and with the identity-rhetorics that are reflected in the strategic plan. Of my 20 interviews with faculty, staff, and students, at least 15 participants called Virginia Tech "an engineering school" or said the STEM-H fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Health Sciences) were the university's major curricular and

research foci. Undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff all agree. One graduate student from agriculture said that as a university “we value football, we value engineering, we value research, we value money,” and an undergraduate student from the social sciences said that “the university is very much focused on engineering and science—all the STEM majors—because that is what is proclaimed to create the most jobs and funding.” From these individuals’ perspectives, Virginia Tech sounds much less like a comprehensive university and more like a specialized university. Furthermore, many participants commented that they thought the Brand Platform itself made the university sound more like a science and engineering school than anything else. One faculty member from natural resources seemed to come to this realization during the interview: “I don’t know though. Academically energized, technologically creative—it actually does read like we’re a science only institution.” And several participants commented that the university’s tagline, “Invent the Future,” applied more to programs in science and technology than anything else.

The strategic plan pushes this STEM-H identity even further by committing the university to strategic growth in these areas of the curriculum, particularly at the graduate level. In fact, the target of an additional 1,000 graduate students by 2018 is specifically recommended to be “mostly at the doctoral level in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health sciences (STEM-H), broadly defined to include associated subject areas, such as STEM- related entrepreneurship, science and technology policy, and ethics.” (VT, *A Plan 11*). These “strategically important fields” are said to “offer significant growth potential, enable us to capitalize on the strengths of our faculty, and best position us to build the

resources essential to developing world-class expertise beyond our current domains of scholarship” (VT, *A Plan* 5).

The STEM-H identity-rhetoric is obviously powerful. It is identified with by a variety of members of the university community. It is visible within the brand itself, and it dominates much of the strategic plan. How does this identity as a university that specializes in STEM-H disciplines, then, coexist with the identity of Virginia Tech as a comprehensive university? And what does this contradiction mean for the power relations involved in the strategic planning process? Through boilerplate content within news stories and collateral materials, the university’s administration has made the comprehensive identity a resource within the university’s social structure, but the preponderance of references to STEM-H in my interviews with university members suggests that the STEM-H identity is also an established structural resource. How can the two seemingly conflicting identities exist as resources within the same social structure?

While postmodern theories of identity may allow for this kind of contradiction by recognizing that subjects can retain multiple contradictory identities and switch between them situationally, Faber argues that this type of contradiction—which he calls “discordance”—will most likely lead to organizational change by creating a crisis (*Community* 37). Faber defines discordance as conflict between organizational images (external perceptions of the organization’s identity) and organizational narratives (internal perceptions of the organization’s identity) (*Community* 36). In the case of the long-range plan, however, discordance seems to be occurring between two organizational narratives—two identity-rhetorics within the university’s social structure. Faber believes these divergent identity-rhetorics struggle for legitimacy and

dominance within the organization (*Community* 123). In the strategic plan, it is clear that the STEM-H identity was victorious in that struggle and gained the identity-power necessary to shape the university's future.

From an activity theory perspective, contradictions like this between mediatory tools and system purposes encourage innovation, which is how activity systems grow and new tools (like genres) are created over time. Following Carolyn Miller's conception of genres as social actions, genres—as mediatory tools within systems of activity—are constituted by “recurring social actions that give rise to regularities in the discourse that mediates them” (Miller, "Genre"; Russell 226). We typically think of these regularities as regularities of form and style, but other aspects of language can be regularized over time as well. In fact, I argue that identity-rhetorics can be operationalized, much like genres, in response to recurring situations to act as mediatory tools within systems of activity. In these recurring situations, certain social actions require specific identity-rhetorics, just as some recurring situations require specific genres.

In the case of Virginia Tech's 2012-2018 strategic plan, both the STEM-H identity and the comprehensive university identity have been operationalized over time to perform different social actions for the university. In the strategic plan, the Presidential Task Force, made the rhetorical choice to emphasize the STEM-H identity, perhaps because of its higher potential for acquiring research funding, or perhaps because it simply matches the university's existing strengths. Either way, members of the task force exercised their own agency to reproduce that particular identity-rhetoric in the strategic plan rather than the identity-rhetoric of a comprehensive university.

Conclusion

The takeaway from this particular case of identity-power in practice at Virginia Tech is that the university's brand—the official, leadership-sponsored version of its organizational identity—is a powerful force within the university's culture. Each of the identity-rhetorics that I have shown to have the identity-power to shape the course of the university in the strategic plan were drawn from the official brand of the university. Even the STEM-H identity, which is not specifically mentioned in the Brand Platform, is implied through the language of the brand, as noted by several interview participants. This means that the leadership-sponsored brand functions as an influential structural resource within the social structure of the university, one that many organizational members probably draw upon in their daily activity on behalf of the university. In short, this case is an example of a situation where university leadership's version of identity has more identity-power to shape the organization than other versions of identity. From a cultural studies position, this seems like a concerning situation. Winsor, however, argues that power is a good thing, even in the hands of those we may not initially believe to have the best motives: "I believe that capitalism's primary valuation of profit often does lead to inhumane behavior on the part of organizations and that power can be misused. But I also believe that for-profit organizations often do useful work and that power is a way to accomplish that work" (*Writing* 11). What I found in this case, I believe, supports that assertion. Many of the identity-rhetorics that originated within the brand and gained the identity-power to shape the strategic planning process represent values and identities that are worthy of admiration. Interdisciplinarity, quality, and cultural respect, for example, are values that I support and identify with, regardless of my institutional affiliation. The brand—as a textual instantiation of

leadership's desired identities for the university—has made those values into official structural resources that any member of the university can draw upon to reify the power and agency to make a difference.

And that is the second takeaway from this particular case study—the duality of structure. It would be easy to say that the brand's influence is overly constraining—blinding members of the university community to other options—but that is not supported by this case study. This chapter demonstrates that members of the university community were able to enact agency in their decision making roles for the university by making rhetorical choices—selecting the most appropriate and effective identity-rhetorics from the available structural resources of the brand and representing some of them as aspirational. Those resources may have been grounded in the official brand, but they were still able to shape the university in unique directions. Giddens' concept of the duality of structure says that the rules and resources provided by social structures are both constraining and enabling (Giddens 25). They both limit what we can do and enable us to contribute. As agents within the social structure of the university, for instance, the members of the Presidential Task Force had the choice to either reproduce the interdisciplinary identity of the university—open boundaries of study and research—as a fact, or they could acknowledge the university's limitations and address it as an aspirational identity. By drawing on that resource, they gained the agency to address what they saw as an opportunity to improve the university. Furthermore, by rhetorically enacting that aspirational identity-rhetoric through the text of the strategic plan, they argue for the collective action necessary to make it a reality, and as the university moves forward with the recommended activities, those aspirational identity-rhetorics will continue to be reproduced

through those actions, which could lead to further identification with that aspect of the university's identity.

It seems that even though branded identity-rhetorics dominated the strategic plan, members of the university community were able to gain the agency to shape the course of the university by slightly shifting the way those identity-rhetorics functioned in the plan. By making them aspirational in nature, they exercised their own agency to shape the university—both its identity and practice—in the ways they saw as necessary. In other words, the brand is a powerful force within the social structure of the university. Its own production and reproduction within the university's culture has given it the power to shape the university's activity, but it is not necessarily the only force that can shape organizational practice.

Chapter 5

Saving Stadium Woods

In 2011-2012, Virginia Tech faced a controversy over the fate of a tract of old-growth forest land on its campus called Stadium Woods. This rare, 11-acre forest is located behind Lane Stadium, the home of the Virginia Tech football team. The controversy centered on plans by the Department of Athletics and the university to tear down part of the woods in order to build an indoor athletics practice facility. Various members of the university, however, opposed that plan. In this chapter, I discuss how those members of the university were able come together and alter the course of the university by enacting powerful rhetorics of organizational identity. First, I describe the events leading up to the controversy and the controversy itself, including the various ways in which opposition groups protested the university's plan. Then, I explain the decision that the university eventually made to build the facility at an alternate location and the university's reasoning for that decision, which I draw from the final report of the ad-hoc committee charged with investigating the controversy and the official recommendation memo from the vice president for administrative services to the university president. Finally, I discuss how the rhetorics of organizational identity used by members of the university community within various spoken, written, and visual texts are intrinsically connected to the university's final decision, demonstrating how both official and unofficial rhetorics of identity have the identity-power necessary to affect the course of an organization and how that dichotomy between official/dominant and unofficial/alternative identities may not be as simple as it seems.

Background of the Case

Located on the campus of Virginia Tech, Stadium Woods is a parcel of undeveloped forest land with numerous trees estimated to be at least 300 years old. Its location makes Stadium Woods accessible to the public and a resource for university programs in forestry, conservation, and wildlife studies. As an old-growth forest located within a developed and populated area, it is truly rare. In 2011, the leadership of the Athletics program proposed that an approximately 3-acre parcel of land that intersects Stadium Woods would be the ideal site for a planned indoor practice facility for the football, soccer, and lacrosse teams. This parcel of land is located next to the current outdoor practice fields and the football team's locker rooms. Originally, the practice facility was planned to be built at a nearby location that is home to student tennis courts and roller hockey rink, but Athletics preferred the new site because of its convenience for student athletes, potential construction issues with the original site, and the fact that its location is not on a busy university street, like the original location.

There is no denying that university athletic programs have power, and it's no different at Virginia Tech. Although the official brand of Virginia Tech does not emphasize the athletic identity, that identity is a very strong aspect of the university's culture, and that affords athletics the power to often get things done in their favor. In fact, several university members that I interviewed commented that some university decisions are made based on that aspect of the university's identity. One graduate student from engineering simply stated, "Sometimes I don't like the way they call the shots," and a faculty member from engineering said, "you value the recognition you get from athletics . . . That one has money attached to it, so it's easy to be for it." In the case of Stadium Woods, it seems that this history of programmatic power led the

Department of Athletics to anticipate very few problems with their decision to move the facility into the woods. In fact, they seem to have considered it “a done deal” from the beginning, which is demonstrated by administration’s first request of the university’s Arboretum Committee: to provide “remediation suggestions for the loss of tree canopy cover” that would result from building the facility in the woods (Seiler).

In November, 2011, however, after some opposition to the project began to build, the Arboretum Committee was asked by the associate vice president for facilities to provide an official position on the siting decision itself. The Arboretum Committee considered the proposal and issued a statement against the proposed location within Stadium Woods because “the unique character and benefits of this woodland would be impacted by construction of the proposed facility” (VT, *A Plan* 50). Throughout this process, the issue continued to gain public attention, and in November, 2011, shortly after the Arboretum Committee’s statement against the plan, a group of concerned students and faculty founded Friends of Stadium Woods (FSW), a grassroots organization committed to preserving the woods and relocating the planned facility site. They immediately created an online petition for the preservation of the woods, asking that the administration build the facility at the original or an alternate site. FSW also created a blog and a Facebook group called “Save Stadium Woods,” which was “liked” by more than 700 users and served as a news sharing source for FSW and a virtual space for concerned community members to share their views and stay updated on the controversy. In addition, FSW organized letter writing campaigns and events to gather support, including a rally to name one of the oldest trees in Stadium Woods after Stephen Colbert, host of *The Colbert Report*, a satirical news show on the television network Comedy Central. They also publicized a seven-

minute promotional YouTube video produced by a Virginia Tech student that has interviews with faculty and students, clips from FSW events, and footage of the woods. Since FSW organized much of the opposition, many of the texts for this case were produced by members of FSW or associated with their events.

In December, 2011, the Faculty Senate unanimously passed a resolution that echoed FSW's online petition, calling for the permanent protection of Stadium Woods and the relocation of the proposed practice facility. In April, 2012, other governance organizations within Virginia Tech followed suit with similar resolutions, including the College of Natural Resource and Environment's Faculty Association, the Graduate Student Assembly, the Student Government Association, and the Commission on Student Affairs. In May, 2012, the Blacksburg Town Council also passed a similar resolution.

In January, 2012, after the founding of FSW and the Faculty Senate's initial resolution, university President Charles Steger appointed an ad-hoc committee to further look into the issue of the woods. The Athletic Practice Facility Site Evaluation Committee (APFSEC) was made up of faculty, staff, students, administrators, representatives from Athletics, and representatives from the local community. The committee was charged with "evaluating the historic, ecological and educational value of the woods area; the relative benefits, costs, and impacts of the woods and alternative sites; and the perspectives on the siting issue among stakeholders and university constituencies" (VT, *A Plan 2*). Additionally, the university contracted with a conservation planning and design firm for an independent ecological assessment of Stadium Woods, in order to determine the actual age of trees in the woods and the environmental impact of siting the facility in the woods.

Between February and May, 2012, the committee met biweekly and gathered data from a number of sources, including the independent ecological assessment, cost estimates for building the facility at various potential sites, a dedicated email address for public comment, an online survey of faculty and staff regarding the educational use of the woods, a random sample survey of faculty, staff, and students, information from faculty who have studied the woods, as well as news stories and letters to the editor published in local and national media outlets.

The Decision

The resulting recommendation from the APFSEC was to relocate the proposed site of the practice facility from Stadium Woods to the original tennis court site and to develop a plan to permanently protect, manage, and use Stadium Woods appropriately. In short, the APFSEC concluded that even though the Stadium Woods site would cost less to develop and is preferred by the Department of Athletics, the overwhelming majority of support for protecting Stadium Woods means that “a decision to build in the proposed Woods site would likely be met by a significant negative reaction from campus and Town constituencies as well as attract regional and national attention” (52). In other words, the rhetoric used by opposition groups was effective. They were able to persuade the committee to recommend that the university protect the woods.

This final report was sent to Sherwood Wilson, the university’s vice president for administrative services, in June, 2012. After considering the report and the committee’s recommendations, Wilson wrote a memo to President Steger in August, 2012, recommending that the university not locate the facility within Stadium Woods. He cites the “detailed and

thorough” work of the committee as well as how impressive it is that “a Committee with members representing such a broad range of constituencies could work together so well to provide such unified recommendations.” However, Wilson recommended against designating the woods as a permanently protected reserve or conservation easement. Although doing so may be prudent today, he said the action was too permanent and may constrain the ability of future administrations to manage the university’s property and resources. The day after receiving Wilson’s memo, Virginia Tech released a statement saying that President Steger accepted both of Wilson’s recommendations.

The decision the university made, therefore, was largely based on the recommendations of the APFSEC, and the data and arguments provided by the APFSEC in their final report echo in a telling way the identity-rhetorics that members of the university community enacted in their efforts to save Stadium Woods. It should be mentioned that throughout this whole controversy, the Department of Athletics at Virginia Tech did not work against the efforts of the opposition in any public way. They had representation on the APFSEC, and they seemed content to allow the decision making process to take its natural course through that committee. Members of the university who opposed the plan to build in Stadium Woods, however, made rhetorical choices in their written, spoken, and visual texts that produced enough identity-power for other versions of the university’s identity to shape that process and save Stadium Woods.

The Identity-Power of Opposition

As theorized in Chapter 2, rhetorics of organizational identity can affect the policies and practices of an organization once they gain enough identity-power to create a consubstantial

identity through the process of identification. Furthermore, the rhetorics of identity at play within an organization range from the official, dominant rhetorics of the management-sponsored identity to unofficial rhetorics that may conflict with that identity and create discordance within the organization. If these unofficial rhetorics are able to become part of the organization's consubstantial identity through identification, then they gain the identity-power necessary to affect the organization's policies and practices. In the case of the Stadium Woods controversy, opposition groups enacted both official and unofficial identity-rhetorics to gain the identity-power to affect the university's decision making process. This includes rhetorics that define Virginia Tech as a land-grant institution, a university that values and supports its athletic programs (but is also more than a football school), a university that supports the sustainability movement, a university that values the democratic process, and a university that has a reputation to uphold. Opposition groups, like FSW, used effective rhetorical strategies to encourage identification with these identity-rhetorics, allowing them to gain the identity-power necessary to affect the university's decision making process through the creation of a consubstantial identity of the university as one that values the woods and protects them from destruction.

Land-Grant Rhetorics

The land-grant values of teaching, research, and outreach are an integral part of the official identity of Virginia Tech. They are represented by the words "discovery, learning, and outreach" in the brand's positioning statement. Furthermore, the land-grant identity is highly identified with by members of the university. At least 15 of my 20 interview participants mentioned the land-grant identity as a major part of Virginia Tech's identity. In response to a

question about classifying the university, one undergraduate student from the social sciences said, “Literally, the first words are that it’s a land-grant university. That’s the first thing that comes to my mind.” And in response to a question about universities that she considers our peer-institutions, a faculty member from natural resources said “I consider our peers to be other land-grant schools like Penn State or Ohio State.”

Members of the university community who opposed building the practice facility in the woods obviously identify with this aspect of the university’s official identity as well because they use land-grant rhetorics often in their efforts to persuade the administration to choose another site. In fact, they talk about the woods as a teaching and research resource, and they draw upon the discourse of outreach when talking about the woods as a service to society and the local community. Through these rhetorical choices, they remind the university’s leadership of this official identity, which did not seem to originally figure into the university’s decision making process.

Many of the texts circulated by Friends of Stadium Woods establish the woods as important to various classes and research activities. They refer to the woods as “a living laboratory” and an “unparalleled teaching, research, and outreach laboratory.” The student-produced YouTube video includes two students who specifically address their own classroom experiences in the woods. One student says, “We came out into these woods and learned about these trees...It was very important for some of the field workshops that we do,” and another student, presumably a graduate student, says, “I’ve actually taught in the Stadium Woods as a teacher’s assistant.” Several documents also mention the use of the woods by the Corps of Cadets as a training ground, and each of the resolutions by university governing bodies

and the Blacksburg Town Council included a statement about the woods' usage for teaching and research: "WHEREAS, the Stadium Woods are used by faculty to conduct both classes and research, and also are used for environmental education for visiting K-12 students and adult learners."

Additionally, many of their texts draw upon the discourses of outreach and access that are inherent to the land-grant identity to emphasize the importance of the woods to the local community, particularly since it is a rare old-growth forest that is highly accessible to the public. Those members of the organization who oppose building the facility in Stadium Woods seem to argue that it is Virginia Tech's responsibility as a land-grant university to protect such a unique resource and preserve it for the benefit of society at large. In a rhetorical appeal to ethos, FSW contacted a forest ecologist and expert in old-growth forests from Columbia University, Neil Pederson, for comment on the situation. Pederson wrote to John Seiler, a professor of forestry at Virginia Tech and a principal member of FSW, in January of 2012 that

The uniqueness of this stand ... is that it is so easily accessible to so many people. Most of the old-growth forests on the list I sent to you are found in rugged or inaccessible areas. Hiking into Sipsey Wilderness in Alabama was not too easy. So, the value here is that, with good, environmentally-conscious development, those with limited mobility can get a sense of awe about what mature forests look like ... because many, if not most, old white oak forests near human settlement were cut, you might have a truly rare piece of property. (Seiler)

Using Pederson’s ethos as an expert who is external to the controversy, FSW was able to establish that the woods are legitimately a unique and awe-inspiring resource that should be made available for the public.

Opposition groups also focused on the intrinsic value of Stadium Woods to the local community as an aesthetically pleasing and calming environment available for the enjoyment of the campus and local community. In fact, each resolution passed in opposition to the plan to build the facility in Stadium Woods had some version of the phrase: “WHEREAS, the Stadium Woods enhance the aesthetics and character of the Lane Stadium area.” The online petition also mentions the “aesthetic and social benefits” of the woods. Furthermore, many of the signs used by the protesters at the tree-naming rally in May, 2012, used the phrase, “Majesty, History, Freedom” (see fig. 5.1). The use of the word “majesty” implies an awe and reverence

for the aesthetic and unique qualities of the woods. The YouTube video also focused on the aesthetic qualities of the woods through visuals of the tree canopy against a bright blue sky, paths through the woods, butterflies, and birds in the trees as well as the sounds of birds chirping in the



Figure 5.1. Sign from the tree-naming rally.

background. The Virginia Tech Environmental Coalition, a student group affiliated with Friends of Stadium Woods, notes on their website and on signs at the tree-naming rally that the preservation of Stadium Woods is largely about “the importance of careful critical thinking in decision making to preserve those things that benefit and are valued by many.” While these

rhetorical moves do function on one level as an appeal to pathos—emphasizing the beauty and tranquil nature of the woods—they also draw on the discourses of outreach associated with the land-grant identity to make the logical argument that it is the university’s responsibility, particularly as a land-grant university, to consider the impact of this decision on the local community by viewing the woods themselves as an outreach resource the university can provide to the community for the betterment of society.

The final report to the university’s president from the APFSEC acknowledged many of these land-grant rhetorics used by the opposition, demonstrating their identity-power. They mentioned all three aspects of the land-grant mission of the university—teaching, research, and outreach. They make a point of listing all the courses in which students use or visit the woods, including courses from Forest Resources and Environment Conservation, Fish and Wildlife Conservation, Landscape Architecture, Biology, Art, the Summer Upward Bound program, and the Corps of Cadets. The committee’s report also mentioned that while they were unable to document any formal research activities underway in the woods, they are informally studied by the Virginia Tech chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. The committee recommended that “relevant CNRE and COS faculty and classes consider more formally documenting future activities of laboratory and service-learning classes relevant to the Woods for the benefit of future users and planners” (41). Furthermore, in response to their charge to determine whether the woods have special significance to the campus or local communities, the committee acknowledged that “the Woods are significant for their intrinsic, non-utilitarian value, as well as for recreation, teaching, nature study, walking passage, and for seeking solitude” (41).

This decision about the significance of the woods to the community and the committee's acknowledgement of the existing and potential teaching and research uses of the woods echoes the opposition's use of land-grant rhetorics. While the university may not have initially considered its land-grant identity in its consideration of the woods site, members of the university community used that official identity for their own purposes. They saw the value of the woods for teaching, research, and outreach activities, and they enacted land-grant identity-rhetorics through various texts to argue for the woods' protection. Through these rhetorical choices, they were able to deploy enough identity-power to make the official, land-grant identity of the university a dominant consideration in this decision, essentially reminding the university of its own official identity as a land-grant institution and the responsibilities associated with that identity.

Hokie Rhetorics

Another official identity-rhetoric that had the power to affect the university's decision in the case of Stadium Woods was the university's athletic identity—the Hokies. As mentioned earlier, the university's athletic identity, while not emphasized in the official brand, is a very important part of the university's identity and one with which many members of the university community identify. Several of my interview participants discussed the school colors and the "Hokie Nation"; a few even mentioned striking up conversations with various "Hokies" they saw wearing the colors in different parts of the world. Being a Hokie is an integral part of the university's culture, especially for students. One graduate student from natural resources said, "I think that the Hokie spirit is very cool. And I think that it's great that everyone wants to go to football games. And I think it's fantastic that everybody knows the cheers. And I think that's

great because that's a cool part of community." An undergraduate student from business discussing what a Hokie means to her said, "Hokie means so many things. Naturally this is the first thing I think of because I worked with orientation for two years: What's a Hokie? I am."

Opposition groups rhetorically positioned themselves as supporters of the athletic programs at Virginia Tech, as Hokies. They explicitly argued that they were not against the facility itself; they simply wanted Athletics to choose another site. In fact, most of them included references and support for the football program in their arguments against the site choice. They demonstrate their support by enacting Hokie identity-rhetorics through various opposition texts and events, including the constant use of verbal and visual references to the athletics teams as well as a consistent narrative about not having to choose between football and Stadium Woods.

The tree-naming rally, in particular, was an excellent example of these Hokie rhetorics at work. Throughout the rally, attendees used visual and verbal references to the Hokies in order to demonstrate their support for the football program. They chanted the "Let's go Hokies" cheer, and many people in attendance wore the school colors, maroon and orange, which the Facebook invite for the event specifically encouraged. Protest signs even included the athletic logo, and bits of orange string were handed out as bracelets to support the cause. The entire event was very pro-athletics, but at the same time, completely against the plan to build the practice facility at the Stadium Woods site. This rhetorical appropriation of the university's athletic identity—an official identity of the university—communicated to the administration, the fans, and the athletes that opposition groups identified with Virginia Tech's athletic programs. They accepted the university's claim that the practice facility would help enhance

that reputation and contribute to student-athlete recruitment. And, they acknowledged that the ultimate success of the athletics programs is dependent on those recruitment efforts. But, they were against the choice of Stadium Woods as the site of construction.

During the rally, the executive director of FSW made a speech in which she said, “to have an old-growth forest on campus is worth something great, just as to win national championships in football is worth something great.” Other texts used by opposition groups had a similar tone and drew on a similar narrative about not having to choose between football and Stadium Woods. The talking points about the controversy provided by Friends of Stadium Woods on their website, for instance, said, “You don’t have to choose, we can have both! Friends of Stadium Woods loves Hokie football. We do not oppose the building of the practice facility, we oppose destroying an old growth forest to do so and think it should be built at an alternative site.” Signs at the rally and various texts produced by Friends of Stadium Woods and the Virginia Tech Environmental Coalition advocated “preserving those things that make us

Hokies, which includes the Stadium Woods, football and perhaps most importantly, community” (see fig. 5.2). The Student Government Association resolution ended with a similar statement: “ADDITIONALLY, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Student Government Association of Virginia Tech supports the general

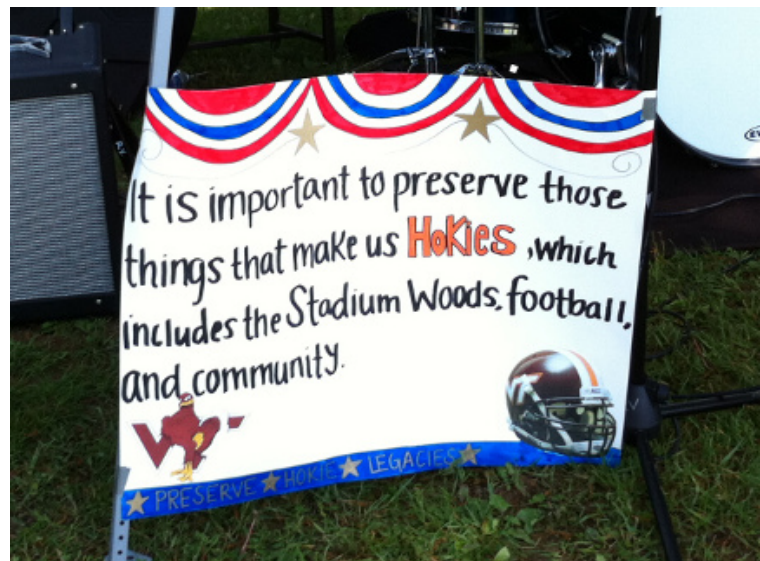


Figure 5.2. Sign from the tree-naming rally.

idea of the proposed athletic facility, and encourages the Office of the President and the Athletic Department of Virginia Tech to relocate it to an area that is less environmentally and ecologically sensitive while still serving the needs of the Athletics Department.”

Essentially, these Hokie rhetorics were acts of stasis, to define the actual issue at hand. According to James Jasinski, the stases are rhetorical tools of invention that “allow participants or observers to understand the essence—the central issue or dispute—in a legal case” (Jasinski 528). Stadium Woods may not be a legal case, but stasis theory still applies because it has to do with the “differences in the ways that disputing parties define their common problem” (Stratman et al. 20) As Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey Grabill, and Kirk Riley found in their study of community participation in environmental discourse, controversies between multiple parties cannot effectively be resolved until all parties involved reach a level of stasis where they agree upon how to define the issue at hand. Opposition groups in the case of Stadium Woods used Hokie rhetorics to define the issue by ensuring that the administration understood their position on the practice facility. They had no problem with the practice facility itself. In fact, they supported it, but they used Hokie rhetorics to specifically define the issue as the possible destruction of Stadium Woods in order to build the facility and gain the ethos of supporters of the university’s athletic programs.

The APFSEC final report acknowledged these rhetorics by noting that football is an important part of the organization’s culture, “but Virginia Tech is more than a football school” (28). The report acknowledged the needs of the Athletic Department and the purpose of the facility, but through the use of that phrase, showed that the identity of a prosperous football team was not the only (or most important) identity at work in this case. Like land-grant

rhetorics, Hokie rhetorics are another example of opposition groups using leadership-sponsored identities for their own purposes. However, their use of Hokie rhetorics was not to remind the university of an identity-related responsibility like their use of land-grant rhetorics. Instead, their use of Hokie rhetorics was an effort to demonstrate that they identified with and supported the athletic identity of the university, therefore, specifically defining the issue at hand as the possible destruction of part of Stadium Woods. By using Hokie rhetorics to define the issue at hand, they made it clear that they supported the athletics program and were only protesting the siting decision, rather than the project as a whole, making it much more likely that the administration would acknowledge and consider their concerns.

Sustainability Rhetorics

A third identity-rhetoric that had the power to affect the university's decision was that of sustainability. Opposition groups used narratives about the university as a proponent of sustainability and a leader in campus and community sustainability initiatives. The online petition argues specifically that the identification of university constituencies with the sustainability movement should guide the university's decision: "Virginia Tech hosts 30,000 tuition paying students. Blacksburg hosts in addition to them thousands of citizens, who, along with many students, strongly support the quickly growing sustainability movement, which involves responsible lifestyle practices, including, but not limited to, conservative and conscientious dietary habits, building practices, and capital usage." Together, the opposition groups argued that the university should protect the woods by choosing an alternate site for the practice facility and preserve the woods in perpetuity. Both of these arguments are based in sustainability rhetorics, and the opposition enacted those sustainability rhetorics by focusing on

the ecological benefits that the woods provide, the wildlife that depends on the woods, the discourse of old-growth forests, and narratives of the historical significance of the woods. Together these sustainability rhetorics create a consubstantial identity for the university as one that values the woods' ecological, biological, and historical characteristics.

First, opposition groups based their argument to protect and preserve Stadium Woods on the importance of the ecological benefits that the woods provide to the university, the community, and the ecosystem. One of the fliers promoting the tree-naming ceremony claims that "we all benefit from the ecological services, such as cleaner water and air that the woods provide." For instance, opposition groups argued that the woods help protect the Stroubles Creek watershed, which has been experiencing significant streambank erosion over the past few years, so much so that Virginia Tech's Center for Watershed Studies received a grant in 2007 to begin restoration of 1.3 miles of Stroubles Creek ("Stroubles"). The resolutions from university governance groups and the town of Blacksburg also claim that the woods aid in drainage and runoff control for the area: "WHEREAS, the Stadium Woods are important for community storm water mitigation through canopy interception and forest soil detention, and provide soil erosion control through vegetative and litter cover and plant root systems."

Additionally, opposition groups continually represented the woods as a vibrant ecosystem that serves as a unique wildlife habitat. The online petition claims that "Stadium Woods is a living ecosystem and wildlife habitat that provides vital ecological functions, aesthetic and social benefits, and is a migration sanctuary for bird species from south and central America," and many of the resolutions passed by university governance organizations include a whereas clause that emphasizes the importance of Stadium Woods to this wildlife:

“WHEREAS, the Stadium Woods are a habitat for an assortment of flora and fauna that are dependent on old-growth forest.” Furthermore, Jeff Kirwan, a professor emeritus and forestry extension specialist at Virginia Tech, claims in the YouTube video that destroying Stadium Woods would be devastating to this wildlife because “loss of habitat means loss of life,” making sure to point out that Virginia is losing 16,000 acres of forest every year, and this type of old-growth forest is essential for some species.

This designation of “old-growth forest” and associated discourses of old-growth trees was also a common way that opposition groups enacted the rhetoric of sustainability in their efforts to protect the woods. Their argument was that old-growth forests are rare. As such, they believe that Stadium Woods should be protected, just as endangered species are protected. In the YouTube video, Seiler called Stadium Woods a “miracle forest,” and said, “It’s beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is really a remarkable thing that’s left here.” The video uses many visuals of the forest canopy shot from the ground, emphasizing the height and age of the trees. Furthermore, the woods are unique not only because of their age, but also because of their location within an urban/municipal environment. Few, if any, old-growth forests are as accessible as Stadium Woods because they have not survived urban development. Pointing this out, resolutions passed by various governance organizations emphasized the age of many of the trees and claimed that the woods “essentially [comprise] a self-contained forest ecosystem” within the urbanized landscape of Blacksburg.

Finally, the opposition often used narratives of historical significance related to these old-growth trees that have been on Virginia Tech’s campus for more than 300 years. The resolutions call the woods “a living reminder of the natural history of the campus and the

region.” Several scenes of the YouTube video point out the oldest trees in Stadium Woods began growing before European settlement of the area and that the trees survived through the development of the United States and of Virginia Tech itself. The “Majesty, History, Freedom” signs at the tree-naming rally also emphasize the woods historical importance in addition to speeches made by several individuals from the university and the local community. For instance, Blacksburg Vice-Mayor Leslie Hagar-Smith read a satirical resolution to protect the woods that claimed that the woods were “more historic than Williamsburg, Mt. Vernon, Monticello and the rest of the Commonwealth’s finest historic treasures.”

Demonstrating the identity-power of these sustainability rhetorics, the final report from the APFSEC made several references to the ecological benefits of the area, its role as a habitat for wildlife, and its uniqueness and historical significance as an old-growth forest. According to the report, Stadium Woods “is unique in size and quality for areas east of the Mississippi River” (39). In fact, the report directly quotes information from Friends of Stadium Woods and Seiler, who, in another rhetorical appeal to ethos, contacted Lawrence Tucei, the Live Oaks Project Director for the Native Tree Society, to comment on Stadium Woods. The report quotes Tucei as saying, “Areas with old trees such as these should be protected. There are many White Oaks in North America in the 50-70 year old range but the 200-500 year old trees are extremely rare” (38). Then the report goes on to say, “Seiler believes that in comparison to other old-growth white oak in the east, Stadium Woods may well be the single largest collection of old white oak.” (38) Furthermore, the report specifically mentions the impact on wildlife if the woods were cut down in order to build the facility: “Wildlife habitat would be negatively impacted. In particular, the Woods are unique for cavity-using wildlife, migratory birds, and possibly the

endangered Indiana bat” (39). It also acknowledges that “an impressive variety of migratory birds has been observed, suggesting Stadium Woods is an attractive stopover site for birds passing through the area,” specifically mentioning rare birds such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and the Cooper’s Hawk (37).

These examples demonstrate that sustainability rhetorics were successful at shaping the final recommendation of the APFSEC, and, therefore, the final decision of the university. Sustainability, here, could be considered an unofficial identity of the university—one that does not appear in the official brand. However, Virginia Tech does actively promote its sustainability efforts. In fact, there were 25 articles tagged as “campus sustainability” on the *VT News* website in 2012 alone, so it does exist as a structural resource within the social and cultural discourses of the university. Much like their use of land-grant rhetorics, then, opposition groups chose to deploy rhetorics of sustainability to remind the university’s leadership of that aspect of the organization’s identity. By encouraging identification with sustainability rhetorics, opposition groups were able to gain the agency to shape the course of the university.

Democratic Rhetorics

The identity of the university as an organization that values the democratic process is another identity-rhetoric that had the identity-power to affect the university’s decision. Those opposed to the plan to build the practice facility in Stadium Woods, particularly the students, drew on the discourse of civic movements and their capacity for creating change as well as visual and verbal representations of patriotism in their appeals for the protection of the woods.

Most notable is the democratic discourse of grassroots, civic movements that FSW drew upon in their efforts to gain public support and communicate their concerns to university

administration. After the founding of FSW in November, 2011, they immediately started planning letter writing campaigns, the petition, and events—all legal forms of protest against the actions of a democratic government or administration. A notice that was posted on buildings around campus about the controversy uses specifically democratic—even revolutionary—language: “Virginia Tech has not been democratic. Virginia Tech has been authoritarian and non-representative...Do not allow yourself to be taken advantage of by a machine!” The tree-naming rally was also particularly dominated by democratic rhetorics, especially narratives of civil resistance. One speaker said that the event was based on “a belief that the right to peacefully protest can still change the world,” comparing it jokingly to the repeal of prohibition. The executive director of FSW also spoke: “This land was given to Virginia Tech by the great commonwealth of Virginia, for the people, to be used by the people for education to benefit the people.” These references to the citizenry and their power to create change in their own communities acted as a rhetorical call to action—not only inspiring people to join the movement, but also communicating to the administration that as members of the university community, FSW and its supporters expected their opinions to be taken into consideration.

Additionally, the rally was dominated by visual and textual representations of patriotism, which further emphasized the democratic, grassroots nature of the event. The “freedom” part of “Majesty, History, Freedom,” inspires thoughts of the democratic freedom of the citizenry to have a say in their own governance. In fact, one speaker at the rally referred to the tree as a “symbol of freedom, liberty, [and] justice.” They also sang “The Star Spangled Banner,” and chanted “USA! USA! USA!” several times. Through the Facebook invitation for the

event, they requested that attendees bring American flags. Several people did, and one even painted his chest red, white, and blue and wore an American flag as a cape. Many of the signs at the event were painted in red, white, and blue with stars and bunting as visual embellishments. Also, many of the pictures of Stephen Colbert, who they were naming the tree after, had him appearing in front of an American flag (see fig. 5.3). These visual and verbal representations of the United States acted as rhetorical appeals to the pathos of patriotism, and that emotional connection supported FSW's democratic ideals.

Choosing to name one of the trees after Colbert seems to support those democratic ideals as well. Colbert's show, *The Colbert Report*, is a satirical news show that parodies political pundits and media correspondents with the purpose of questioning the dominant rhetorics of government and political debate. The choice of Colbert seems to imply not only that members of FSW admire him as a celebrity and hoped to garner national attention for their cause, but it could also imply a connection between his efforts to expose and question dominant discourses and FSW's own efforts to question the university's decision to build in the woods.

The idea of democracy itself is a very powerful rhetorical tool. Ralph Cintron argues that democracy has become ontologized into a symbol of righteousness: "I mean to say that over a number of centuries democracy has acquired a certain primordial value, an automatic virtue, a



Figure 5.3. The visual representation of patriotism dominated the tree-naming rally.

kind of fundamental, nearly metaphysical rightness” (99). While Cintron believes the motives behind the use of this democratic rhetorics should be critiqued, he acknowledges the power they have to “mobilize social energies” (103). In the case of Stadium Woods, opposition groups harnessed this power and this automatic virtue of democratic rhetorics to establish their movement as something worthy of interest and consideration—to mobilize the community to support the preservation of the woods.

These rhetorics of democracy were echoed in the report from the APFSEC. Representation on the committee, in fact, was democratic because they included faculty, staff, students, administrators from Athletics, and members of the local community. Furthermore, they purposefully gathered information from several perspectives regarding the controversy because they claim that Virginia Tech “aims to be a model of democratic processes and governance” (26). Their final recommendation was “in the spirit of compromise and consensus” to “balance considerations of cost, building aesthetics, disruption of existing uses including parking and pedestrian movement, and minimal impact on the Woods” (11). This spirit is in accordance with the democratic rhetorics that opposition groups chose to use in their rhetorical efforts to protect Stadium Woods. The identity-rhetoric of a democratic organization, therefore, had sufficient identity-power to shape the committee’s recommendation.

Reputation Rhetorics

The final identity-rhetoric that had the power to change the course of the university in the case of Stadium Woods are rhetorics related to the university’s reputation. Both leadership and other members of the university community obviously want the university to have a good reputation. They want it to be seen as trustworthy and responsible, but opposition groups

actively questioned that identity by accusing the university of not acting in accordance with its own documented policies and principles and by drawing on the discourses of Virginia Tech's own heritage and history.

Many of the texts created to oppose the plan to build the practice facility in Stadium Woods claim the university is not acting in accordance with its own documented policies and principles. They state that the university has publicly committed itself to sustainable practices and being a good steward of its natural resources. The decision regarding Stadium Woods, they imply, is a test of the university's true commitment to those ideals. Texts specifically mention the university's Climate Action Commitment Resolution in 2009, which created the VT Office of Sustainability and dedicates the university to a sustainability plan that focuses largely on efficient energy usage but also discusses increasing the university's tree canopy cover and effectively managing stormwater runoff. Several texts also point out that Stadium Woods itself was designated as an "environmental greenway" in need of protection in the university's 2009 Master Plan. In fact, most of the resolutions passed by governance bodies state, "WHEREAS, the 2009 Virginia Tech Master Plan Amendment designates the Stadium Woods as an 'environmental greenway,' thus as a 'significant reservation of lands, waterways, tree stands, and cultural landmarks for future generations'" in order to demonstrate the university's prior commitments to the woods and sustainability in general.

Furthermore, opposition texts often mention Virginia Tech and Blacksburg being recognized as a Tree Campus USA and Tree City USA, respectively, by the Arbor Day Foundation. These texts argue that by destroying part of Stadium Woods, this status could be called into question or that the university simply would not be acting in accordance with how a

Tree Campus USA should behave. One student on the YouTube video questions the university's motives in seeking this distinction: "It's great to say that we're a Tree Campus USA, but then you're talking about tearing down an old-growth forest . . . I just want this university to back up its words with action, as opposed to just PR, just good PR." Another student simply says, "It doesn't make any sense." These remarks imply that the university's reputation is at stake in its decision regarding the woods. Through these rhetorics of reputation, opposition groups are questioning the university's commitment to its own sustainability initiatives and challenging the university to keep its word.

Other texts further this implication by drawing upon discourses of Virginia Tech's own heritage and history. One sign at the tree-naming rally noted, "The decision that Virginia Tech makes will reflect directly on the values of whether to or not to uphold those concepts that we have learned in our very classes." Another student interviewed for the YouTube video goes a step further: "Honestly, it's embarrassing for the school that we're coming from. We're a land-grant university with an agricultural history, and we have a fantastic forestry department. And, the fact that we would disrespect them to the point of threatening to cut down part of a forest that is unique to the entire east coast . . . It's irresponsible."

These reputation rhetorics ended up having quite a bit of identity-power to affect the university's final decision. The most powerful evidence of this identity-power appears in the final report from the APFSEC. The report states,

The issue of impact on the University's reputation was not part of the Committee's charge, but as the movement to protect the Woods gained traction and national attention and many email comments were received that were highly critical of the

University considering the Woods option, it became apparent that this could be the most important criterion to be considered in a siting decision. (28)

They specifically mention several instances where donors threatened to cancel gifts to the university if it pursued the Stadium Woods site, and two individuals resigned from university committees and cancelled donations until the university decided not to build in Stadium Woods. The report also summarizes the 538 email comments that the committee received through a dedicated email address as well as the responses to the committee's surveys, and it includes an appendix with links to 51 media stories, editorials, and letters to the editor from a variety of local and national news outlets. Their conclusion was that the "overwhelming majority opposes siting the facility in Stadium Woods and requests the Woods be permanently protected" (52). The Committee's decision to recommend building the facility at an alternate site, therefore, had more to do with a concern for the university's reputation than with any other criterion the committee considered.

Part of the APFSEC's concern for the university's reputation was that Virginia Tech had already made a commitment to the woods, which echoes many of the texts created by the opposition. The Committee even calls the decision to build in Stadium Woods an "unprecedented action" of going against the 2009 Master Plan (12). They claim that "many eyes across the Commonwealth and the nation are on the University regarding this siting decision. University officials must consider the potential impact, both positive and negative, of this decision on Virginia Tech's image and reputation, and consequent effects on attracting a diverse student body and private fundraising" (29). In other words, the university's decision could have material consequences for the university.

These reputation rhetorics may have had the most identity-power of any of the rhetorics enacted by opposition groups because according to the APFSEC, it was the deciding factor in their recommendation to not build in the woods. Furthermore, like land-grant and sustainability rhetorics, these reputation rhetorics served to remind the administration about their responsibility to uphold prior commitments. Their success is apparent in the committee's final recommendation, which indicates that deciding not to uphold the 2009 Master Plan and stand by its classification as a Tree Campus USA could have serious consequences for the university's reputation, its financial future, and its ability to grow its student body.

The Agency to Deploy Identity-Power

As defined in Chapter 2, identity-power is the ability to create a consubstantial identity for an organization and, through that process of consubstantiation, to affect the course of the organization because when we become consubstantial with each other, we act in accordance with that identity (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 21). The case of Stadium Woods demonstrates that other versions of organizational identity, not just the official brand, can have identity-power. The rhetorical choices that opposition groups made encouraged identification with a variety of identity-rhetorics, and those identifications had a definite effect on the final decision made by the university. That is to say, opposition groups had the agency to shape the course of the organization in this case. According to Giddens, agency is the power to make a difference in the world, and this case shows that members of the university community can have that type of agency (14).

Furthermore, the opposition's power was reified through their effective use of identity-rhetorics. The opposition demonstrated a skill at selecting *topoi* appropriate to the situation and researching effective support for their arguments. *Topoi* are the mental constructs "we use to discover what may be said" about a particular subject (Hauser, *Introduction* 112). They are inherent to the rhetorical process of invention, and they originate within the social structures within which we operate. Giddens sees structures as both constraining and enabling (Giddens 25). They contain the rules that govern our actions, but they also contain the resources that allow us to take action. In the case of Stadium Woods, the cultural and social discourses of Virginia Tech as a social system provided the resources—*topoi* in terms of existing official and potential unofficial identity-rhetorics—that the opposition needed to act against the plan to build the practice facility in Stadium Woods. Through their skillful and effective use of those identity-rhetorics, opposition groups were able to become powerful agents and effect change in the system.

In other words, in this case, identity-power was reified through the opposition's ability to determine the most appropriate and effective rhetorical strategies among the resources available to them. Herndl and Licona claim that this skill is inextricable from agency and power: "a rhetor's abilities and accomplishments make a difference in how her performance is accepted...it is part of the complex relations that make agency possible" (Herndl and Licona 140). Carolyn Miller also claims that "rhetoric provides powerful structural resources" ("Rhetorical" 75). For example, the opposition's use of sustainability rhetorics draws on the university's existing discourse on campus sustainability. While that structural resource is not part of the university's official identity—the brand—it is part of the university's social structure,

the various discourses that make up the university's culture. Likewise, their use of reputation and democratic rhetorics, while not part of the brand, are resources available to them as members of a university community that cares about its image and is located within a democratic nation. They use these rhetorics to "draw more resources into the network the writer is constructing," and effect change within the university's social system (Winsor, "Using" 425).

This concept of rhetorical resources also explains how opposition groups were able to use official aspects of the university's identity, such as its land-grant identity and its athletic identity, to argue for their own cause. Those identities exist as resources within Virginia Tech's structure of knowledge, and, as agents within that structure, they were able to redirect those identities to their own purposes: "Agency speaks, then, to the possibilities for a subject to enter into a discourse and effect change—even change that might serve to further entrench a dominant social order" (Herndl and Licona 135). By using land-grant and Hokie identity-rhetorics, they strengthened those aspects of the university's dominant identity, but in the process, achieved their own goal of saving the woods. These identity-rhetorics, therefore, cannot really be called alternative identities, even though they were used by opposition groups, which leads me to believe that the dichotomy of official/dominant versus unofficial/alternative identities is not nearly as simple as it seems.

As noted in Chapter 1, in cases of decision making, universities often encounter conflict between their utilitarian identities and their normative identities (Albert & Whetton 105). In the case of Stadium Woods, the initial dominant identity was the utilitarian identity of a fiscally responsible university with a potentially successful football team. All other identities,

particularly the normative ones, were suppressed in favor of the identity that supported the plan to build the practice facility in Stadium Woods because it was the most cost-efficient option and it was most convenient for the athletes, which would help the athletics program more effectively recruit top players. John Sillince calls this type of dominant identity the salient identity: “Salient identity refers to the current prioritization of who we are ... and why something needs to be done” (Sillince 201). Organizations, therefore, can make choices about which identities become dominant—or salient—depending on the context of the situation and the organization’s purpose. Originally, Virginia Tech chose a salient, utilitarian identity because the loss of the woods appeared to be an acceptable trade for a state-of-the-art indoor practice facility. Those opposed to this plan, however, expected the university to also consider its normative identities, based on their own perceptions of the identity of the university community to which they belong. Some of those perceptions and the resulting rhetorics of organizational identity were not in conflict with the official brand because they were already part of the university’s social structure. They were not, however, initially salient identities in this situation, so opposition groups enacted these official but non-salient identities to argue against the university’s decision.

Therefore, the dichotomies of official/unofficial and dominant/alternative identities are not dichotomies at all. They are more spectrums of identity-salience, where any particular identity (and its associated rhetorics) can slide up or down in salience, depending on the situation and the agents and power relations involved. Given the case of Stadium Woods, then, identity-power plays a part in movement along the spectrum. The salient identities in any given situation are those that have identity-power, which are often those supported by leadership,

but this case has demonstrated how other members of the university can gain enough agency through rhetoric—by making effective rhetorical choices and creating identification with non-salient identity-rhetorics—to affect the decision making process of the university.

This case has also shown, however, that identity-power is not just exercised through the agency that comes with effective rhetorical deployment of resources. Power is also exercised through authority, which is why Stadium Woods has not been permanently protected.

Opposition groups were able to save the woods from development in the short term through the successful deployment of non-salient identity-rhetorics. They were not, however, able to convince the administration to permanently protect the woods from development. Many texts produced by opposition groups encouraged the university to designate Stadium Woods as a reserve or conservation easement of some kind. Each governance resolution requested “that the Office of the President begin the process to designate the entirety of the present day Stadium Woods as a permanently protected place,” and several other texts produced by FSW made similar appeals. The APFSEC recommended such a move, but in his memo to the President Steger, Wilson said that he did not recommend it because “these designations are permanent and we do not want to restrict the ability of future leaders to manage the physical campus 100 years from now.”

Therefore, the power to make a difference is not just based on a subject’s ability to deploy structural resources, especially within hierarchical organizations like universities. It also arises “from the positions in which we function and the power those positions allow us to exert” (Winsor, "Using" 413). Herndl and Licona differentiate between the agent function, which allows individuals to make a difference within an organization, and the author function,

which allows an individual to produce meaning for an organization. Those individuals, like university presidents and vice-presidents, who have authority inhabit a “place that has been constructed, through cultural and intellectual labor, as authoritative” (Herndl and Licona 142). Their power comes from their position within the organization and the structural resources and rules that give that position authority. With that authority Steger and Wilson were able to constrain the ability of the opposition groups and the APFSEC to gain the agency to protect the woods in perpetuity. According to Herndl and Licona, this is a common effect of authority: “authoritative practices can so condition the opportunity for agentic action that it becomes extremely difficult for some subjects (typically those from nondominant groups) to successfully occupy and engage the agentic space” (Herndl and Licona 143).

The opposing groups and their various identity-rhetorics did not have the power to accomplish the goal of permanent protection because of this authoritative ability to constrain agency. The utilitarian identity of the university remained salient in this aspect of the decision because the power to make the final decision lay within the authority of Steger’s position. Presumably, the administration believes that the ability of future university leaders to manage campus land-use is more important than the normative goal of protecting the woods. This demonstrates that even though university members are powerful enough to effect change through the effective use of non-salient identity-rhetorics, that agency can still be constrained by the power of authority.

Conclusion

While the various groups involved in protesting the construction plans in Stadium Woods were pleased with the announcement to find an alternate site, many were dissatisfied with the decision not to designate Stadium Woods as a permanently protected place. In a letter to the Board of Visitors after the decision announcement, FSW claimed that “We have the opportunity to literally “Invent the Future” which ensures the protection and continued presence of the forest,” using the university’s own tagline to argue for their alternative viewpoint. FSW has said it is committed to continuing its movement to protect the woods, so this aspect of the controversy continues. In fact, since the data collection phase of this dissertation, FSW has held several protests and events to keep raising awareness about the issue and to keep raising the funds to continue arguing for permanent protection. For example, several members of FSW chained themselves to several trees in the woods to keep football players from parking there and damaging the trees’ root systems. A few members were even arrested during this protest.

It seems that the only way to preserve Stadium Woods beyond the foreseeable future is for opposition groups like FSW to continue encouraging identification with these identity-rhetorics at the highest levels of the university’s administration. We have seen in this case that versions of an organization’s identity that were not initially salient to the university’s decision making process can be made more salient through rhetoric. However, even then, leadership’s authority can constrain that agentive power. Perhaps successfully making the organization’s leadership consubstantial with a non-salient identity is the only way for university members to ensure their agency. Accomplishing that, it seems, would be true agency.

Chapter 6

The Evolution of a Brand

Chapters 4 and 5 show how Virginia Tech's brand and other organizational identity-rhetorics are able to shape the university's policy and practice through the power of identification. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the brand is a powerful force, but members of the university community can draw upon the brand to shape the course of the organization in specific ways. The strategic planning process may have been dominated by branded rhetorics of identity, but members of the planning task force were able to claim agency in their rhetorical representation of those identity-rhetorics as aspirational identities. Chapter 5 demonstrates that members of the university can affect organizational decision making through the strategic use of specific identity-rhetorics. Some of these identity-rhetorics initially conflicted with the identity-rhetorics behind the university's decision to build the practice facility in Stadium Woods, but the opposition's ability to encourage identification with these non-salient aspects of the university's identity gave them the identity-power to change the university's final decision.

In this chapter, I switch focus to the brand itself. Here, I use the data I have gathered about the brand and my interviews with members of the university community to search for any connections between changes in the brand since its initial launch in 2006 and the many organizational identities represented by various members of the university. Essentially, this chapter focuses on whether the official, leadership-sponsored brand of the university is at all responsive to different identity-rhetorics within the university community. Or, is the brand, as a leadership-sponsored version of organizational identity, an inflexible, static identity text

intended to control organizational identity messages and shape the university's culture to the perceptions of leadership? By focusing on the ways in which the official identity of the university is produced and reproduced, I determine the nature of the power relations between the brand and other versions of the university's identity.

To better understand Virginia Tech's brand, how leadership expects it to be used by communicators across the university, and to explore how the brand has changed since its launch in 2006, I conducted participant-observation of the university's Brand Ambassador Program. The Brand Ambassador Program is a training program offered by Virginia Tech's Office of University Relations through the Faculty Development Institute. It consists of 13 one-hour courses that explain the brand in detail, its history, and the ways it can be used by university faculty and staff across various media. Once an individual completes six of the 13 courses, he or she becomes a certified brand ambassador for the university. As a brand ambassador, these individuals are expected to work to bring their units' messaging into alignment with the brand.

In order to gain the most insight into the brand as possible, I was able to gather data from each of the brand ambassador courses (see table 3.1). I participated in seven of the courses in person, and I observed Adobe Connect recordings of four others. For the final two courses, I obtained copies of the instructor's presentation slides. By analyzing these data about the brand, its development, and its use, I am able to determine ways in which the brand itself has changed since its launch and leadership's reasoning for those changes. Information from my interviews with university faculty, staff, and students supplement this material by providing a glimpse into how members of the university community perceive these changing aspects of the university's identity, and therefore, members' roles in the evolution of the brand itself.

The (Re)Production of a Brand

According to Larry Hincker, Virginia Tech's associate vice president for university relations, the move toward the current brand began in 2004 when President Steger noted that the university needed to reposition itself because state funding was dwindling, and the university would soon need to rely more heavily on tuition revenue. The brand at the time focused on the tagline "Putting Knowledge to Work," which Hincker says did not appropriately acknowledge the university's role in creating knowledge, rather than just applying it. From a rhetorical perspective, these explanations constitute the exigence for the university's decision to create a new brand. An exigence is "a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" that can be corrected through rhetoric (Bitzer 6). During the next couple of years, the university worked with a marketing and brand development firm that specializes in educational and non-profit organizations to develop a new branding message. The new brand launched in February, 2006, including a new tagline, "Invent the Future," the identity and style guide, which provides graphic and textual style guidelines for official university communications, and the brand platform (see fig 3.1). These aspects of the new brand constitute the university's rhetorical solution to the exigencies of the landscape of higher education in Virginia. Furthermore, the brand's creation shows that university leadership thought that these situations could be modified through rhetoric. Therefore, the brand itself is the university's rhetorical effort to change the realities of Virginia Tech's situation, but in order for that to happen, the brand must gain the identity-power to affect the course of the university.

Since the brand's launch, the Office of University Relations has developed the Brand Ambassador Program as a way to encourage identification with the brand within the university community. The program is an ongoing effort by University Relations to train university communicators in the appropriate usage of the brand in their daily work. The courses not only describe the brand in detail and how to use it across various media; they also explain the resources available to communicators throughout the university, such as advertising, publication, and photography assistance—all of which is very much centered on the official message of brand and its related identity-rhetorics. Essentially, the Brand Ambassador Program is an leadership's rhetorical effort to encourage members of the university community to identify with the brand and to accept the necessity of a single, official identity for the university.

Part of that rhetorical effort is a common narrative told in several of the brand ambassador courses, which specifically works to explain the necessity of a single identity, especially in terms of style and design. The story goes that one inspiration for a single, official identity for the university came when Hincker collected the business cards from faculty and staff across the university. When gathered together, he realized that no two units' cards were the same. Each one used different logos, layouts, colors, and typefaces. There were no common elements or standard designs, which meant that the university was not presenting a unified face to its audiences. The story is often accompanied by a presentation slide with a photo of the various business cards (see fig. 6.1). The first



Figure 6.1. This business card slide, which often accompanies the retelling of Hincker's story. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

time I heard this story was from Hincker himself in the “History of the Brand” course, but it was retold in several other courses as the reason that the university needs visual and textual style standards, which are a big part of the brand.

Zachry says that a workplace narrative like the business card narrative “reinforces the logic of current practices and discourages change” (Zachry 113). In other words, workplace narratives are rhetorical moves that establish the rules and resources of the social structure by naturalizing them through their retelling. The more the story is told, the more its message seems to become a tacit point of understanding between organizational members. Therefore, this narrative within the Brand Ambassador Program reinforces the idea that Virginia Tech is a decentralized organization that is in dire need of a central, unified branding message. It explains, in one short story, the necessity of identity standards in design and messaging, which complements the program’s purpose of encouraging identification with the leadership-sponsored version of the university’s identity.

By naturalizing the brand as necessary and as a “common sense” version of the university’s identity, leadership reinforces their own version of identity. In the following section, I provide three examples of how the Brand Ambassador Program and various marketing campaigns rhetorically produce and reproduce this leadership-sponsored version of the university’s identity. Just as I have demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 that members of the university community can enact identity-rhetorics, including the brand itself, to shape the university’s decision making practices through identification and consubstantiation, leadership can also enact the brand and its associated identity-rhetorics to change how members identify

with the university, specifically to align their identifications more closely with the desired leadership-sponsored identity.

“I invent” Campaign

In 2012, Virginia Tech’s Office of University Relations launched an on-campus campaign called “I invent.” Through this campaign, University Relations worked to increase awareness of and identification with the brand, specifically with the “Invent the Future” tagline. The campaign included a photo booth that was placed at various locations and events on campus for students, faculty, and staff to have their pictures taken. Those who participated were asked to summarize how they invent the future in their daily roles as members of the university community. Many of these statements were posted on the campaign’s Facebook page and used for the undergraduate admissions campaign in the fall of 2012. At each photo-booth event, participants were also given t-shirts, door hangers, and stickers with the campaign’s “I invent” logo (see fig. 6.2).



Figure 6.2. The “I invent” logo. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

This particular on-campus campaign seems to be a rhetorical move by leadership to encourage more identification with the tagline, “Invent the Future,” specifically with the word “invent.” Some of my participants like the tagline. One staff member called it “the perfect three-word summary of our brand.” Several participants, however, noted their frustration with it. Some of them said that the use of the word “invent” seems to relate more to the STEM-H disciplines, thereby excluding the liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences from the tagline,

which is supposed to represent the entire university. Others said that the word “invent” made them think of a specific methodological and entrepreneurial process, that again excludes various disciplines within the university. And still others said that they were not even sure what it was supposed to mean. The message of the tagline was completely lost on them. One participant said it is “such a ghastly phrase,” and another called it simply “a very pretty piece of marketing.”

This obvious frustration across campus with a core aspect of the brand is similar to Faber’s concept of discordance or the idea of a contradiction within activity theory. In both situations, organizations can take some action to correct the conflict, which seems to be the rhetorical purpose for the “I invent” campaign. In that case, the campaign would be an explicit effort to show university members how the tagline can and does apply to the work done by faculty, staff, and students all across campus.

From the campaign’s Facebook page, responses to the prompt “How do YOU invent the future?” vary from ways that students and faculty are working to invent cures for cancer and faster computer networks to inventing music, dance, better writers through work with the VT Writing Center, as well as a better future for all through leadership and service activities. Furthermore, staff members’ responses vary from helping to invent students’ futures through advising and counseling services to helping to invent the university’s future through administrative and housekeeping work. All of these responses demonstrate to those involved and the university community at large that the “Invent the Future” tagline can be relevant to all types of work being done at the university. They function as individual narratives within the larger organizational narrative of ways the university invents the future. Zachry claims that “the

stories that circulate in the workplace form identities for individuals by introducing subject roles that can be occupied by organizational participants” (Zachry 114). By inviting university members to engage in the identity-rhetoric of the tagline and write their own narratives about how it applies to them, the “I invent” campaign is not only introducing the subject role and identity of someone who invents the future on a daily basis, but it is encouraging large scale identification with an identity-rhetoric with which many university members did not identify.

From the data I have gathered, there is no way to tell if specific individuals’ perceptions of the tagline changed due to the campaign, but the purpose of the campaign seems clear in light of the contradiction between the brand and member perceptions of the university’s identity. Individuals from University Relations called the campaign an effort to “refresh” or “relaunch” the brand with the specific purpose of increasing awareness about the brand and its messages. It goes beyond increasing awareness, though, to an explicit effort to encourage identification and application of the brand to members’ daily lives. It is a rhetorical move on the part of university leadership to bring members’ identity perceptions more in line with leadership’s official version of the organization’s identity, which Faber calls “realignment”: the rhetorical process of bringing discordant identity perceptions into alignment (*Community* 39).

Impact and Outreach Identity-Rhetorics

Another example of leadership’s rhetorical efforts to realign member perceptions with the official brand is a movement to replace the word “results” in the Brand Promise with the word “impact.” In 2012, an advertising campaign was built around the word “impact” and the message that Virginia Tech’s research and intellectual capital are resources for economic growth within the Commonwealth of Virginia (see fig. 6.3) Also, according to Albert Raboteau,



Virginia Tech helps the commonwealth weather financial uncertainty and high unemployment by stimulating economic development and creating jobs. True to our roots, we're using intellectual capital, research prowess, and collaborative resources to launch innovative enterprises that improve lives. Partnerships like the new Rolls-Royce jet engine plant in Prince George County, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute in Roanoke, and Southside's Virginia Institute for Performance Engineering and Research are all examples of how we're boosting the economy and creating career opportunities never before available, making Virginia Tech responsible for more than 17,000 jobs and a \$1.5 billion economic impact across the state.

To learn more, visit www.vt.edu/impact.



Figure 6.3. One of the “impact” campaign’s advertisements, which focuses on Virginia Tech’s economic development role in the medical industry. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

the director of development communications at Virginia Tech and one of the instructors of the “Writing for Our Brand” course within the Brand Ambassador Program, there is a discussion within University Relations to change the Brand Promise because the word “impact” is more forceful and seems more significant than “results.” This change in the wording of the brand,

however, seems to imply more when we consider the meaning of the words in relation to the university's land-grant mission. In those terms, "results" conjurs images of the successful completion of experiments or other research projects and the creation of new knowledge, but it does not emphasize the application of that knowledge. Of course, the creation of knowledge for its own sake is an admirable goal for any institution of higher education, and emphasizing knowledge creation was one of the reasons for the new brand in the first place. However, land-grant institutions, by nature of their tripartite mission of discovery, learning, and outreach, have a responsibility to take that knowledge and apply it in some way to benefit their communities. The proposed change of the third word of the Brand Promise to "impact" implies more than forcefulness and significance. It implies the application of those results and that knowledge to make a difference in some way. It implies outreach.

I believe this shift within the brand may be partly an effort to realign the perceptions of university members who are dissatisfied with the ways in which the university is (or is not) accomplishing that third aspect of its land-grant mission. In my interviews with members of the university community, several participants spoke about how they did not really see the university engaging in as many outreach activities as it should, especially since the Positioning Statement and one of the Brand Drivers specifically mentions outreach. One staff member who was a student of the university and has worked there for many years said that 30 years ago, the outreach and co-op aspect of Virginia Tech was much more prominent, but now "I'm not sure that we're serving and engaging the citizens of the Commonwealth. That's where I think we're missing the boat with our land-grant values, but I think it's because we are a high-performing research university. And I think when you put all your eggs in one basket, it's hard to pull a

couple out once in a while.” An undergraduate participant from agriculture agreed that “the outreach aspect [of the university] is declining,” and a faculty participant noted that “except for outreach for economic development, which has become a really big push, I don’t think outreach really helping organizations and individuals be successful in whatever they’re trying to do gets nearly the emphasis it used to get.” Also, one graduate student participant from agriculture expressed her own dissatisfaction with the university because she decided to attend a land-grant university because of the opportunity to do “community-based extension work.” She thinks, though, that “there’s a part of Virginia that we forget, and we’ve forgotten.” Another staff member echoes this dissatisfaction with the types and amount of outreach in which the university engages when she says, “I think we have structures in place that minimally satisfy that requirement. I don’t know if I honestly believe that our research efforts are driven by the notion to make the world better. I think our research efforts are driven by who is willing to fund what.”

The “impact” campaign and the potential change to the Brand Promise, then, seem to be the beginnings of a leadership response to this member dissatisfaction, by trying to demonstrate how the university is impacting the community through its outreach activities. Similar to leadership’s effort to demonstrate how the tagline can apply to everyone’s work on campus through the “I invent” campaign, the use of the word “impact” throughout university messaging could be, in part, an effort to align member perceptions of the university’s outreach efforts with leadership’s version of the organization’s identity.

The focus on the economy within the campaign is strong, as mentioned by one of my participants, obviously showing that leadership sees Virginia Tech’s current outreach identity as

one of an economic engine for the Commonwealth of Virginia, but if my interviews are any indication, much of the university membership seems to identify with outreach in more local, community-based terms. By emphasizing the university's impact through economic development, however, leadership is encouraging identification with their interpretation of outreach. Furthermore, their goal is more than simple identification. Through the campaign and the shift in the Brand Promise, they could be arguing for a more permanent shift in organizational priorities, toward more partnerships that lead to economic development initiatives. In fact, the 2012-2018 strategic plan includes a couple of strategy recommendations that explicitly encourage such partnerships: "Create meaningful partnerships with businesses and government entities to address critical and complex problems by co-locating researchers and practitioners in 'living labs' where users, in partnership with researchers, drive problem formulation and research design" (VT, *A Plan* 11). As these texts circulate, the identity-rhetoric of outreach as economic impact is continually produced and reproduced, leading to more arguments for organizational action, which, in turn, will continue to produce that identity.

Distancing from the Athletic Identity

A third example of university leadership using the brand to alter perceptions among members and reproduce their own version of the organization's identity is the visual standards that are included in the university's "Identity and Style Guide." These visual standards, in particular, appear to make an explicit effort to separate the visual identity of the university as a whole from that of the university's athletic identity. The visual standards for the university add additional colors to the official color palette of the university beyond Chicago maroon and burnt orange, the official colors of the university and its athletics teams. These additional colors

include shades of blue, red, green, gold, brown, and gray that act as secondary, complementary, and accent colors to the dominant colors of maroon and orange. The style guide also explicitly limits who can use the athletic logo (see fig. 6.4) and the HokieBird (see fig. 6.5), saying that neither can “be used for academic applications, academic products, or university websites” (VT, *Virginia* 30). Discussion of logo usage was common in the Brand Ambassador classes, as many who enrolled in the classes found themselves having to tell colleagues in their home departments that usage of the athletic logo was inappropriate for an academic unit and not allowed under the identity guidelines.



Figure 6.4. The slanted VT athletics logo. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.



Figure 6.5. The HokieBird. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

This confusion between the athletic identity and the university’s identity seems common. In fact, one participant in the Brand Ambassador Program claimed that associating a university with its athletic teams is “very American,” so trying to distance the two from each other may not make sense to many people. In my interviews, many participants were quick to categorize Virginia Tech as a football school. One staff participant claimed, “When people ask about Virginia Tech, their minds go to two places. They go to [the campus shooting on] April 16, or they go to football.” Undeniably, football and athletics, in general, are a huge part of Virginia Tech’s culture and identity; however, leadership’s rhetorical strategy with the brand’s visual standards is to distance the two identities from each other a bit. Cecelia Crow, the university’s brand manager, said during this discussion in one brand ambassador course that while the

brand was being developed, they briefly considered incorporating the athletic “VT” logo with a university wordmark, much like West Virginia University does, but they eventually made the explicit decision to create a separate visual identity for the university.

We know that an organization’s visual identity includes its symbols or logos, its name or wordmark, its typefaces, and its colors, all of which are repeatedly used in most organizational documentation; therefore, an organization’s visual identity is considered one of the most prominent aspects of the organization’s brand (Baker and Balmer, 371). These visual aspects of the organization’s identity become a type of visual “shorthand for the personality of the company and its values” (Baker and Balmer 370). While the athletic identity and its visual components represent one aspect of the university’s personality and values, the explicit decision to separate the two identities in the creation of the brand—combined with the additional colors added to the brand’s color palette beyond the official university colors of maroon and orange, as well as the identity guidelines that forbid the use of athletic logos by academic units—is a leadership-led effort to focus on other aspects of the university’s personality and values by somewhat disassociating the official brand from the athletic identity. These decisions represent a rhetorical move on behalf of leadership to encourage university members—and external audiences—to identify with Virginia Tech on additional levels beyond its “football school” status. Of course, Virginia Tech will always be associated with its athletic identity, but these efforts are encouraging identification with other aspects of the university’s identity as well.

For example, the official wordmark of the university includes a line drawing that represents “the pylons,” a campus landmark that honors Virginia Tech alumni who have died

while in military service and which literally lists eight values of the Corps of Cadets and the university: brotherhood, honor, leadership,



Figure 6.6. The university wordmark. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

sacrifice, service, loyalty, duty, and *ut prosim*, which is the university's motto and means "That I May Serve" (see fig. 6.6). In my interviews, several individuals mentioned the pylons as representative of the university's values, especially the value of service. The simple line drawing functions as a Peircien icon for these values as well as the university's history and traditions. In Charles Peirce's theory of semiotics, an icon is a signifier that "looks in some respect or to some degree like the signified, in the way that a picture of a tree looks like a tree and the steepness of the slope of a graph resembles the rate of growth of some phenomenon" (Van Leeuwen 49). That iconic similarity between the wordmark and the pylons, then, is the basis for an emotional appeal. Charles Hill claims, "once the association between a particular image and a value is created and internalized, the image becomes a symbol for the abstract value and can be used to trigger its associated emotions" (Hill 35). The drawing of the pylons in the wordmark allows the wordmark itself to represent the emotions, values, and traditions of the university associated with the pylons, which comprise a different organizational personality and identity than is represented by the athletic logos. By encouraging identification with these values and emotions, leadership uses the wordmark to begin to create some distance between the university's brand—its academic identity—and the athletic identity.

By creating this distance between the two identities, university leadership creates a separate identity for the university from the athletic identity, and the Brand Ambassador Program transmits that identity throughout the university. Essentially, this distance emphasizes

different resources within the university's social structure and creates rules that govern how these old resources can be used by university membership. By establishing additional color palettes and a wordmark as new resources and creating rules to govern the use of existing resources (the athletic visual identity), university leadership constrains how university members can represent the university visually, effectively separating the academic side of the university from the athletic identity.

Leadership's agency to make these changes is a product of its authority and its rhetorical skill. As the organization's leadership, they have the agency to dictate identity-related rules and resources by virtue of their positions. Much like President Steger's authority to constrain the agency of opposition groups to permanently protect Stadium Woods, University Relations uses its authority to constrain the agency of university communicators in how they visually represent the university. They accomplish this goal through the Brand Ambassador Program and through the *Identity and Style Guide*, where they encourage identification with an identity of the university that is separate from athletics. By doing so, they create a cycle of production and reproduction that continually reinforces this separate academic identity, which, in turn, makes the brand more powerful.

In fact, each of the above three examples demonstrates how members of university leadership use the authority inherent in their positions as well as their rhetorical skill to encourage more identification with the brand, providing it with even more identity-power. In Winsor's on-going study of four engineers, she found that one of her research participants was able to use his own authority and rhetorical skill to negotiate a contract in favor of management, which he represented ("Using" 424). Similarly, in these examples, members of

leadership use their authority and rhetorical skill to shape the identity-related resources and rules within the social structure of the university, effectively constraining members' use of those resources and encouraging on-going production and reproduction of the official brand. By doing so, they are attempting to give the brand more identity-power by encouraging a higher level of identification with its version of the organization's identity, and as those identifications create a state of consubstantiality within the university community, they will begin to affect organizational practice. Furthermore, if organizational practice begins to reflect the brand even more—as seems to be happening with the impact identity-rhetoric—then those activities will continue to strengthen the brand's position through the cycle of identification and organizational activity (see fig. 2.2)

Evolution of the Brand

Brands, however, are not supposed to be inflexible, static texts created by management alone. A brand is supposed to be a “living entity” that is “co-produced with consumers and other stakeholders” (Csaba and Bengtsson 122, 124). It is the image that organizational stakeholders form in their minds when they think of the organization, so it necessarily must change and evolve over time. The Brand Ambassador Program uses a similar definition of a brand during its “History of the Brand” course. Hincker claims that branding is all about attributes assigned to a particular organization. He says it is what people think when they hear the organization's name. Branding an organization is not about what's on paper or a logo. It's about a “continuum of attributes in the mind of your stakeholders;” therefore, when that perception changes, the brand has to adapt.

According to Balmer, one of the most crucial groups of stakeholders is the membership of an organization—its internal stakeholders (Balmer 271-274). In terms of universities, internal stakeholders include current faculty, staff, and students, as well as current board or advisory members. As stakeholders, their perception of the university should contribute to the evolution of the brand, but as current members of the university, they also function as communicators of the university's messages. As such, they communicate their own perceptions of organizational identity and, therefore, can affect the perceptions of other stakeholders. The organizational identities perceived by university members, then, can—and should—have a profound effect on the university's official, leadership sponsored identity because they have the potential to shape both internal and external perceptions of the university. In this section, I provide one example of how a new aspect of the university's identity was able to gain the identity-power to effect a change within the official brand of the university through large-scale identification.

“Community” Identity-Rhetorics after April 16

On April 16, 2007, a Virginia Tech student shot and killed 32 individuals on campus before committing suicide. The event was a turning point for the university in many ways, and six years later, the after-effects of the tragedy are still perceptible on campus. In discussing the university's identity, nearly all of my 20 interview participants mentioned the events of April 16 without being prompted, indicating that it was a defining moment for the university and an integral part of its identity. One faculty member from natural resources said, “I think we showed that we are a resilient community, that Tech does have a really strong sense of community.” That theme of the university's sense of community and its members' commitment

to, support of, and loyalty to each other was a common observation by participants. For instance, a graduate student from natural resources said,

In terms of loyalty to each other and to this community, I mean, look at Monday night [the fifth anniversary of the shooting], I think there's a really strong community here . . . You know there's this degree to which people really stick by this institution through thick and thin. And I think that's really good that people tend to feel a lot of care about each other here and what happens here, and they're really loyal.

The same student said that "if something happens to you here, there will be a support system, or if something happens to someone else, everyone will come together to try and deal with that." A faculty member from the library noted that "whether it's April 16th or all of the charitable events, the Relay for Life, those kinds of things, the extraordinary way that the students really seem to hang together is really quite refreshing."

This sense of community after the events of April 16 was so strong that media reports even picked up on it. A graduate student from agriculture noted, "a lot of people know us as rebuilders because after that happened in 2007 . . . I can remember seeing the television, the media coverage and the community just mourning for each other and building each other, supporting each other." Several of my student participants even noted that part of their choice to attend Virginia Tech was directly related to the sense of community that they picked up on in media reports. One graduate student from the sciences, who was also an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech, said after "seeing people that cared about one another . . . I said that's the place where I'm going to school." In fact, Virginia Tech's number of undergraduate admission applications increased significantly in the two years following the tragedy. From the

fall semester of 2006 to the fall semester of 2007, undergraduate applications increased by 509 applications, and the number for the fall of 2008 increased by 1,185 applications. There is no way to tell if this increase is directly related to the tragedy, but considering some administrators were concerned that applications would fall off, this increase seems to support my participants' comments.

The events of April 16, therefore, have become an integral aspect of the university's history and its internal and external identity, especially the idea that Virginia Tech is a cohesive community that was able to come together and support each other through the tragedy. The brand, however, did not reflect this particular aspect of Virginia Tech's identity. In the months that followed, university leadership realized that since the perception of the university had changed due to the tragedy, the brand needed to change as well. In the "Expanding the Brand" course for the Brand Ambassador Program, Crow said that after April 16, the world saw a different side of Virginia Tech as a close-knit community, but since that was not represented in the brand, the brand had to change to accommodate that perception. The university no longer had awareness issues, but circumstances had changed. So, the university needed to make some changes to keep up with those circumstances and perceptions.

These changes included an increased focus in the university's messages on academic quality and Virginia Tech as a research institution, in an effort to draw attention away from the tragedy, as well as a focus on the university as a caring and inviting community. Interestingly, that increased focus on the identity-rhetoric of community was not accomplished by changes to the Brand Platform. The change in the brand was only reflected in the university's use of photography in advertisements and other collateral materials in the months following April 16.

For instance, according to Crow, the university began using photographs in print ads that show a lot more student interaction and collaboration—with each other and with faculty (see fig. 6.7). Previously, the photography style was more focused on the work that individuals did, like a photograph of a single person in a lab coat working in a lab, but the new style, which is now a standard of the university’s visual communication strategy, demonstrates collaboration and student interaction through photographic evidence, in order to reflect that identity-rhetoric of community that came out of the tragedy.

In theories of visual persuasion, photographs are more persuasive than other types of images because they imply a sense of reality that other types of images do not. Hill discusses the persuasiveness of images in terms of vividness. The most vivid information, of course, is actual experience, but on the continuum of vividness, photographs are higher than other types of still images, like paintings and line drawings, and lower than video (Hill 31). In



Figure 6.7. Photographs in admission advertisements in the years following the events of April 16 show students interacting with each other and with faculty in order to communicate the identity-rhetoric of community. Used with permission of Virginia Tech.

advertisements, the vividness of “photographs implicitly reassures the prospective customer [or, in this case, student] that what she or he is seeing is a truthful representation of the real thing” (Messaris 135). That implication of truth is due to the conception that images produced through mechanical means are more objective than images produced by humans. Roland Barthes relates this conception of truth to visual semiotics where photographic images are assumed by many to be an image without a code: “The relationship of signifieds to signifiers is not one of ‘transformation’ but of ‘recording,’ and the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic ‘naturalness’: the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical is here a guarantee of objectivity)” (Barthes 158). Even scientific disciplines treat mechanically-produced images as “implying ‘objective truth’ . . . which allows images to demonstrate and prove things” (Winn 354).

Of course, the images produced by Virginia Tech to represent the rhetoric of community were staged to some degree, but that does not diminish their rhetorical effect. According to David Blakesley, “the visual functions as an appeal, an assertion that has been constructed and placed by pointing the camera in particular directions,” and that rhetorical appeal works to draw on the rhetoric of community created by the events of April 16 (130). Therefore, the change in Virginia Tech’s photographic style is a rhetorical appeal by the university to reinforce the rhetoric of community that became a part of the university’s identity after the events of April 16 by showing “photographic evidence” that students, faculty, and staff on campus do, in fact, collaborate and interact with each other in various settings.

In my interviews, a graduate student from natural resources said that this “idea of having loyalty to this community, [is] something that obviously came organically out of what

happened on April 16.” That organic identification with the rhetoric of community that happened within the university created an additional aspect of the university’s identity (and image) that was not accounted for within the official, leadership-sponsored brand. Most likely, the identity-rhetoric of community was already part of the cultural and social discourse of Virginia Tech in some way. It could be related to the university’s motto of *Ut Prosim*, “that I may serve,” or to the university’s roots as a land-grant, agricultural school, or even to its rural location. In any case, that identity-rhetoric was nowhere near as powerful then as it is now, but the events of April 16 led people to begin drawing on and identifying with that identity more than before. As a result, it became one of the most powerful aspects of the university’s identity, and still is.

By including the rhetoric of community in its communication efforts, leadership effectively legitimates an unofficial identity as official. Foucault’s archaeological project is essentially about investigating how legitimated knowledge within a particular culture or structure of knowledge became legitimated discursively and historically (Scott, Longo, and Wills 13). In this case of how the brand and its use has evolved, we are able to witness, in real time, how the legitimated, official brand of the university can change in response to the identity-power of other versions of the university’s identity. We see how and why a particular identity-rhetoric becomes legitimated within the university social structure. As the identity-rhetoric of community gained identity-power through immense levels of identification, external audiences even began to identify with it, and leadership made the rhetorical choice to embrace that identity and incorporate it into the official brand.

Conclusion

By examining the ways the brand has changed since its launch and listening to the ways that members of the university community identify with the organization, in this chapter, I explore whether the official, leadership-sponsored brand of the university is responsive to different identity-rhetorics within the university community. I ask whether other versions of organizational identity have the identity-power to shape the leadership-sponsored version of organizational identity. Based on the examples above, I find that the brand is quite powerful. Many of the changes made to the brand and the way it is used by organizational members are reflections of leadership's authority and the resulting identity-power of the brand to control the structural resources and rules related to organizational identity within the university's social structure. And, with that identity-power, the brand has begun to affect organizational practice.

While this seems concerning, remember that the brand's purpose is to unify perceptions of the university's identity and through that unification, create a purposeful direction in which the university can move. At Virginia Tech, the brand seems to be accomplishing that goal, but the final example of the university's response to the events of April 16 demonstrate that the brand is not entirely static and unmovable. There is still some room for other versions of the organization's identity to gain the identity-power to alter the brand itself and the way it is deployed. Through the process of identification on a massive scale, the perception that Virginia Tech is a cohesive community that supports each other through even the worst of times became part of the university's message and externally perceived identity, even though it was not part of the brand. And, since the university's external audiences picked up on this mass-identification across campus, leadership made the rhetorical choice to alter the way they

treated the brand and university messaging because a brand, after all, is supposed to be a co-creation between the organization and its audiences.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have examined the phenomenon of university branding and its effect on the organization itself through the lenses of rhetoric and power. By examining texts related to three case studies of organizational decision making at Virginia Tech in terms of the identity-rhetorics involved in each case, I have explored the power relations between leadership's official version of the organization's identity—the brand—and other versions of that identity with which members identify, and I have demonstrated how the power to make a difference within an organization is enacted through rhetoric. Rhetoric, in this dissertation, is more than the purposeful use of language, though that is a part of its purview. Rhetoric is also a method for discovering the most effective ways to create change within organizations. By assessing organizational situations and determining the most appropriate discursive resources at their disposal, organizational members can create texts that respond to those situations in ways that inspire particular actions. This dissertation demonstrates how various versions of organizational identity can function as rhetorical resources in that process and expands our understanding of the effects of a branding initiative on one large, research university.

Each of my case studies addresses this rhetorical process within a unique type of university activity. Chapter 4, the case study of Virginia Tech's long range plan, analyzes the role of various organizational identities within a case of university policy and strategy creation. It demonstrates the power of the brand to shape the course of the organization but, also, how university members can enact the agency to shape the future of the organization through their rhetorical choices. Chapter 5, the Stadium Woods case study, examines the role of

organizational identity within a campus controversy, where members of the university community strategically use various aspects of the university's identity to successfully oppose a specific decision made by the university. And, Chapter 6, the case of the brand itself, examines the role of members' perceptions of organizational identity in the production and reproduction of the brand. It explores how university leadership ensures the dominance of the brand's version of organizational identity but, also, how it responds to new or conflicting versions of that identity. This research design allows me to witness the ways in which the brand and other versions of organizational identity rhetorically construct each other and organizational practice within three very different examples of organizational decision making and policy creation, providing this study with a more comprehensive view of organizational identity in practice within a complex organizational setting.

As shown in Chapter 1, previous studies of branding initiatives have taken a decidedly management-centric approach that assumes the necessary dominance of the official leadership-sponsored identity of any organization. This dissertation, however, approaches organizational identity from a new perspective that acknowledges the potential rhetorical power of alternate or competing versions of identity to shape not only the official identity of the organization, but also organizational policy and practice. Furthermore, Chapter 1 also shows how studies of university branding initiatives largely treat university brands as similar in purpose, creation, and execution to corporate brands. Granted, the need to differentiate the organization from competitors is a core purpose of university brands, and accomplishing that differentiation requires some level of message unity across the university, which both corporate and university brands attempt to provide. Universities, however, are inherently

multi-vocal organizations, and creating a central, monolithic branded identity for the entire organization may ignore or even repress other members' versions of the organization's identity.

This dissertation addresses these concerns with the ways in which organizational identity, particularly university identity, has been studied. My rhetorically-grounded approach, which is based on identity-formation through identification as well as the role of rhetoric as a method of determining the most appropriate and effective ways of moving people to action, acknowledges the role of language in organizational life and recognizes its potential impact on organizational activity. I argue that the various texts and discourses of organizational identity not only affect how the university is perceived, but they also function to shape the university's future actions and policies. This perspective allows me to explore the ways that the various rhetorics of identity within the university (including the official, leadership-sponsored brand and other versions of organizational identity held by university members) contradict, reflect, and co-construct each other and organizational practice.

With these goals in mind, the following research questions have guided this dissertation:

- In the struggle to shape university practice in these cases, which rhetorics of organizational identity have the necessary power to affect the course of Virginia Tech as an organization?
- How is that power reified in each specific case?
- What is the nature of the power relations between the various rhetorics of organizational identity at Virginia Tech, particularly between the official, leadership-sponsored brand of the university and the alternative rhetorics of organizational identity? Is the brand hegemonic?

In this concluding chapter, I address each of these questions. Then, I explore the implications of those findings. Specifically, I discuss the implications for theories of organizational identity and power, the implications for rhetoric and professional writing theory about the role of identity discourses and texts in organizational activity, the practical implications for professional communicators who are responsible for creating, maintaining, and communicating branded messages, and the implications for professional writing pedagogy. Finally, I explain some of the limitations of this particular study and suggest future avenues for research into branding and organizational identity from a rhetorical perspective.

Powerful Identity-Rhetorics

Based on these three cases of university decision making and policy creation at Virginia Tech, there is no denying that the brand is a powerful force on campus. The brand is essentially a collection of texts that drive university messages and activity. Stephen Doheny-Farina, in his study of a company's business plan, points out that texts do have the power to shape organizations in certain ways. He found that "the persuasive power of the plan encouraged individuals to take certain actions that brought the company from concept to reality" by "both reflect[ing] and shap[ing] the social and organizational environment" (Doheny-Farina 307). Similarly, each of my cases shows how the brand shapes the social and organizational environment of Virginia Tech. Each case is dominated by identity-rhetorics that seem to come straight from the brand or from other official, documented positions taken by the university. The long range planning case shows that the identities of the university as a research institution and a technological leader, both taken directly from the brand, drive its plans for the future.

Plus, the language of the Brand Promise—“quality, innovation, and results”—dominates much of the plan. The case of Stadium Woods demonstrates the power of the university’s land-grant identity and athletic identity, for instance, as well as the identity of the university as a sustainable institution, which may not be part of the brand, but it is an official position of the university that it communicates to its audiences often. And, the case of the brand itself shows that most of the ways in which the brand is produced and reproduced on campus focus on encouraging identification with leadership’s version of identity, rather than adapting the brand to other versions of identity. These cases show that the brand is a powerful discursive resource within the university’s social structure. Even in cases of resistance to leadership’s decisions, university members draw upon the identity-rhetorics of the brand in order to effect change within the organization.

Still, my cases demonstrate that the brand’s power is not absolute. Ever since the political arenas of ancient Athens, rhetoric has enabled the citizenry at large to participate in the decisions that affected them through deliberation and debate. At Virginia Tech, members of the university community are able to adapt the brand for their own purposes and use it to argue for change. In the case of the Long Range Plan, members of the task force drew upon the branded rhetorics of diversity and cultural inclusion as well as interdisciplinarity as aspirational identity-rhetorics. They acknowledged that those aspects of the university’s identity did not entirely reflect the current state of affairs on campus, but they used those aspects of the brand to propose further changes on campus that will begin to make those identities a reality. In the case of Stadium Woods, opposition groups were able to use branded identity-rhetorics, like the land-grant identity, to save the woods from destruction. They were able make that identity

salient to the controversy, even though it was not initially a salient consideration in the university's decision making process, effectively reminding the university of its responsibility to that aspect of its identity. Opposition groups were also able to use widespread identification with the university's athletic identity to help them define the issue. As fans, their opposition was not to the practice facility itself, but to the siting decision, and by using the athletic identity in their own arguments, they made that distinction clear.

Furthermore, my cases show that members of the university community also are able to make strategic rhetorical choices that encourage significant identification with other rhetorics of identity that are not represented in the brand, and through those identities, affect the university's policies and decisions. For instance, opposition groups in Stadium Woods used the rhetoric of democracy to mobilize support for their cause and encourage the university to honor the wishes of its constituents. In the case of the brand itself, the identity of Virginia Tech as a supportive and cohesive community after the events of April 16 became so identified with by members of the university that leadership changed the way the brand represented the university in its official communications.

These examples demonstrate that while the brand is a powerful force on campus, there is still room for other versions of organizational identity to have a significant influence on the organization as well. As members of the university community enact these other identities, the identities gain power and become part of the structural rules and resources that make up the university's social structure and organizational culture. With this identity-power, these other rhetorics of organizational identity can rhetorically shape organizational activity.

Identity-Power, Reified

Identity-power is linked to agency because agency is the ability to “make a difference” within an organization (Giddens 14). Identity-power, specifically, is the power to make a difference by creating or changing an aspect of the organization’s identity. And, in my case studies, I have confirmed that this particular kind of power is reified through members’ use of rhetoric. As noted in Chapter 2, the process of identification is central to the ways in which organizational identity can affect organizational practice. Through identification, individuals become consubstantial with each other, and that consubstantiality leads them to act together in certain ways (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 21). Therefore, one way for agents within an organization to gain the power to affect organizational activity is to make effective rhetorical choices that encourage identification with the identity-rhetorics that most benefit their cause.

My data demonstrates that successful identification, and therefore the successful reification of identity-power, is accomplished through rhetoric. In fact, agency and identity-power often depend upon the agents’ rhetorical ability to operate within the structures of the university’s social system. Within those structures are the rules and resources of the organization’s culture, and those resources are the “tools that [agents can] use more or less well to enact an intent” (Winsor, “Using” 413). Those resources include aspects of the university’s identity—identity-rhetorics—and my cases show how agents within the university were able to successfully determine the most appropriate and effective identity-rhetorics to respond to a variety of situations. Then, by deploying those identities through various texts, they were able to accomplish their own goals, as well as the university’s. For instance, in the case of Stadium Woods, opposition groups used existing documents, such as the 2009 Master

Plan, and video of students drawing upon the narratives and discourses of the university's history and heritage as an agricultural institution to cast doubt on the university's reputation if it decided to destroy part of the woods for the practice facility. This doubt itself was an identity-rhetoric with which many members of the university community could identify. Also, in the case of the evolution of brand, leadership used various texts to encourage further on-campus identification with the brand tagline: "Invent the Future." Through testimonials and events, the "I invent" campaign demonstrated that the tagline can be applicable to a wide range of campus activities, rather than just those in science and engineering.

These two examples, in particular, also show that strategic identification through the rhetorical use of texts can be accomplished by both general university membership and leadership. Both have access to structural resources that they can use to affect the organization; therefore both have the potential for agency. Sewell claims that agency and the power to act depends on agents' "knowledge of the schemas that inform social life" (20). Agents throughout the university have access to knowledge about the university's identity and the accompanying resources, which they can use to develop persuasive texts that argue for particular organizational action. With the appropriate rhetorical knowledge and skill, anyone can use those resources to gain the agency to affect the organization through identification, but my cases also show that authority plays a role in agency as well.

Winsor claims that agency is often a "sociomaterial" phenomenon, that "arises not from some unified valorized self but from the positions in which we function and the power those positions allow us to exert" ("Using" 413). This authority allows some individuals within the social structure to have agency simply by virtue of their position. Steger's decision to not

permanently protect the woods is one example. By virtue of his position, he was able to define the university's identity as an institution that values future flexibility over its commitment to the woods. The ability of University Relations to dictate how the athletic and academic logos can be used by members of the university community is another example. By establishing rules for the usage of logos, University Relations creates a bit of distance between these two identities. Leadership's authority, then, gives them the agency to change the university's identity outside the process of identification. They may attempt to encourage identification once they make the changes—like they do within the Brand Ambassador Program—but the authority inherent in their positions allows them the agency to create aspects of the university's identity without necessarily obtaining widespread identification first.

Furthermore, my cases demonstrate that identity-power is possible, even without agency. In the case of the brand itself, I showed how the identity-rhetoric of community was able to gain the identity-power to create a shift in the way the organization represents itself visually. No university members, leadership or otherwise, made that happen through agency or authority. It happened "organically," to quote one of my interview participants. That identity, however, was created through identification. Members of the university community rallied around the concept, so much so that external audiences picked up on that identity. Over time, as identification grew, university leadership adapted the visual standards of the brand itself in order to incorporate that identity into the official identity of the university. Now, as it continues to be produced and reproduced through various organizational texts, that identity-rhetoric continues to grow more powerful as a structural resource within the university's social system.

The Brand as a Hegemonic Force

As noted above, my cases show how powerful the brand is and how leadership's authority allows them to control the identity-related, structural rules and resources available to university members. In light of that authority, is the brand is a hegemonic force working to maintain leadership's control? My data show that the answer to this question is both yes and no. Gramsci defines hegemony as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci 12). The operative word here is "consent." Hegemony requires that those subordinated by a dominant group consent to that domination by accepting it as "'normal reality' or 'commonsense'" (Williams 145). My cases, however, support Mumby's claim that hegemony is not an either/or condition of organizing. Indeed, hegemony is more appropriately conceptualized as a continuum ranging from the total integration of worldviews into a single, all-encompassing ideology . . . to situations in which there is widespread resistance and a plurality of voices competing for preeminence. ("Problem" 364-365)

My cases show that many university members accept certain aspects of the brand as commonsense: the research university identity and the land-grant identity, for instance. In these cases, they consent to the hegemony of the brand and continue to reproduce those aspects of the brand in their own rhetorical choices. This consent is a result of leadership's own use of rhetoric. Leadership uses the Brand Ambassador Program and various marketing campaigns to encourage further identification with aspects of the university's identity, like the tagline, in order to ensure the continued reproduction of the brand. Foucault believes that "for

[the dominant class] to ensure its domination and for that domination to reproduce itself is certainly the effect of a number of actual pre-meditated tactics” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 203). The Brand Ambassador program and campaigns like the “I invent” campaign are examples of such rhetorical tactics that maintain the dominance of the brand and encourage its reproduction by members of the university.

According to Mumby, however, while hegemony describes “how a particular group comes to exercise intellectual and moral leadership over other groups,” it is not necessarily the pejorative term that many critical theorists assume it to be (“Problem” 348). Because hegemony is more of a continuum of control, hegemonic structures of knowledge can coexist with opportunities for agents to resist those structures of knowledge. In my case studies, there are several examples of university members resisting the university’s hegemonic structures of knowledge by rhetorically adapting the brand to their own uses or creating additional identities for the university through the process of identification. These cases support Mumby’s argument that “far from unwittingly engaging in consent to hegemonic relations, organization members have a variety of discursive and behavioral resources upon which they can draw in order to create a space for articulating alternative identities and social realities” (“Problem” 362). In my cases, these discursive resources consist of various identity-rhetorics (official and unofficial) that members adapt to their own uses in order to gain the agency to make a difference within the university. Their use of rhetoric to determine the most appropriate and effective identity-rhetorics to deploy in their texts helps them to resist the potential hegemony of the brand. Just as Giddens’ theory of structuration acknowledges both the constraining and empowering nature of structure, Gramsci’s conception of hegemony acknowledges that social change is

possible even within a hegemonic social system (Mumby, "Problem" 366). Therefore, while the brand itself may be a hegemonic force within the social structure of Virginia Tech, striving to ensure its own reproduction through leadership's authoritative efforts, my cases show that other members of the university community can have the agency to shape university identity and practice as well.

Implications for Theory

The finding that the brand is somewhat hegemonic is one way in which this dissertation contributes to theories of organizational identity and power. First, it demonstrates that the formation of organizational identity is bound up in the power structures of an organization. Identity is neither a top-down declaration of organizational leadership nor a bottom-up, democratically created representation of members' perceptions and beliefs. Rather, it is a negotiated position that is constantly being produced and reproduced by members at all levels of an organization through the hierarchical power relations that both constrain and enable agency within social and organizational structures. Second, my case studies' support of the claim that hegemony is not an either/or concept expands our understanding of organizational power relations. Even in situations where hegemonic structures produce and reproduce "commonsense" ideas of identity and experience, constraining member agency and behavior, there is still the opportunity for resistance.

Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to theories of professional writing and rhetoric by demonstrating one way in which texts can structure organizational activity. My cases show that organizational policy and practice are guided by the identifications that

members make with various rhetorics of identity. Whether they are branded or not, these rhetorics of identity are communicated in the texts and discourses that talk about who we are as an organization. When organizational members identify with those rhetorics, they act accordingly. In other words, organizational, collective action is driven by organizational identity, which is formed through the rhetorical process of identification. And identification begins with members' ability to assess a rhetorical situation and choose the most appropriate and effective identity-rhetorics with which to respond to that situation.

Implications for Practice

Knowing, therefore, that brands and other versions of organizational identity have the potential to drive organizational practice has implications for professional communicators. In fact, this finding could mean that professional communicators have more opportunities for agency within their organizations than they may think. With this potential in mind, brands and identity-related documents become more than mere marketing material. They become potential textual tools for the reification of identity-power with the potential to shape organizational practice. Of course, the process of moving from identity-rhetoric through identification and to reification in organizational activity is not always a rapid one, but the knowledge of this link between identification and practice is a useful starting point.

Additionally, the knowledge that brands have the potential to be hegemonic forces and constrain the identity-related resources available to organizational members should lead professional communicators who are involved in the creation and maintenance of brands to aim for somewhere in the middle of the hegemony continuum. Particularly within universities,

the branding phenomenon is not going away. As discussed in Chapter 1, brands are useful tools in distinguishing universities from their competitors and enhancing their positions in stakeholders' minds. The hegemonic aspect of branding as a practice helps to ensure the more "unified" messages that contribute to this purpose. However, this dissertation has shown that other versions of organizational identity exist and have the potential to provide necessary incentives or conduits for organizational growth. Furthermore, brands themselves are supposed to grow and evolve, and those other versions of organizational identity can serve as the catalysts for that growth. Therefore, professional communicators involved in university branding efforts need to acknowledge these other versions of organizational identity and consider their role in the organization. Otherwise, university brands have the potential to become a blind exercise of pragmatism that Scott, Longo, and Willis call hyperpragmatism—"a hegemonic ideology and set of practices that privileges utilitarian efficiency and effectiveness, including rhetorical effectiveness, at the expense of sustained reflection, critique, or ethical action" (9). Professional communicators need to be open to members' perspectives and continually revisiting their organizations' brands to make sure that they are still relevant and representative, rather than entirely hegemonic and static.

Implications for Pedagogy

These implications for professional communicators are also relevant to the professional writing classroom. In fact, the inspiration for this dissertation was partly in response to Herndl's 1993 call for professional writing research to move beyond the descriptive in order to avoid simply reproducing dominant social structures and ideologies in our research and our

classrooms (224). By critiquing the power relations involved in branding initiatives and exposing the ways that other versions of organizational identity can have the identity-power to shape organizations, I am looking for ways to help my students understand how to effectively and ethically work within, and even work to change, these structures. As Henry has pointed out, teaching our students to be critical consumers of discourse is not enough. We also have to teach them to be critical producers of discourse (Henry 215). We accomplish that by making our students aware of the organizational and social structures within which they will operate as professionals and the rules and resources (both hegemonic and resistant) that may be available to them or constrain them within those structures. Gramsci calls this a political awareness of circumstances, which Mumby says “goes beyond common sense understandings of the world, and resides in the ability to demystify, critique, and act against hegemonic systems of meaning and power” (“Problem” 350).

Limitations of this Study

This dissertation is an embedded case study of three of cases of decision making and policy-creation at Virginia Tech. As a case study of one organization, I cannot claim that it is representative of all university branding initiatives or all organizational structures of identity. It does serve, however, as a critique of the power structures related to organizational identity and branding within a complex, organizational setting. As such, my findings from this case are useful to scholars of professional and technical communication, critical organizational communication studies, and organizational identity as an example of the ways in which these structures and

our rhetorical choices can affect organizational identity formation and organizational activity within the organizations we study and for which we work.

Also, this particular study is focused on the internal effects of branding and organizational identity. I purposefully did not include data or analysis of the branding cycle outside of the internal production, reproduction, and effects of organizational identity. While I studied the dissemination of branded texts to audiences within the university (through the Brand Ambassador Program and various internal campaigns), I did not study the dissemination or consumption of branded texts in relation to any external audiences. My purpose was not to study that aspect of the process, but there may be additional cultural, structural, and power considerations within those aspects of the branding process that this dissertation did not explore. Also, because of this internal focus, there were some potential groups of participants that I did not include. For instance, many alumni of the university would most certainly consider themselves part of the “university community,” but I chose not to include them in my interviews because they likely are not currently, actively involved in the on-campus activities of the university.

Furthermore, because of time constraints and the evolving nature of this project as it moved forward, I was unable to acquire some of the data that could have led to a potentially more rich description of my cases. For example, since my project is focused on the ways in which identity-rhetorics, which are communicated through various texts, affect the course of the institution, my focus on the texts related to each case is useful, but having the opportunity to directly interview key players in each case or observe meetings and planning sessions could have led to a deeper understanding of those rhetorics. Several of my interview participants

were directly involved in the decision making processes of my cases, but additional interviews related to each specific case could have also been beneficial.

These limited opportunities for gathering data as well as the internal focus of this dissertation also led to my project not being able to fully engage with some of the challenges to the brand. Additional internal identity contradictions may exist that were not reflected in my interviews, and various external challenges to the university's image may also affect the internal discourse of the university's identity. For instance, significant challenges to Virginia Tech's external image come from the various lawsuits filed against the university in the wake of the April 16, 2007, tragedy. Among other things, these lawsuits and surrounding discourses raise questions about Virginia Tech's leadership and their commitment to the ideals of a caring community. Similar challenges undoubtedly exist from a number of sources, and these additional contradictions are sure to affect the university's internal discourses of identity. I was unable to fully explore those connections, however, within the scope of this dissertation.

Finally, my own experience as a university communicator may have led me to accept the university's branding initiative somewhat uncritically. I spent six years in various roles as a university communicator at another institution. In those roles, my job was to communicate the university's official identity and work to unify the university's messages; therefore, I may be somewhat biased toward accepting the necessity of university branding initiatives in general. My purpose in this project was partly to critique the effect of branding on a university, but as a former university communicator, I often found that critical space difficult to inhabit. I believe my experience was a strength in one way—allowing me to understand the processes of

branding and the positioning of the university's leadership—but it also could have blinded me to some of the brand's own problems and limitations.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are several potential avenues of research that I recommend as useful to studies of rhetoric, organizational identity, and branding that will serve to validate and extend the research presented in this dissertation. First, since my findings in these case studies show one way in which organizational identity works to shape organizational activity through rhetoric, further studies of that connection should be considered. Specifically, studies of other universities or other types of organizations, such as nonprofit organizations, corporations, and governmental organizations, would demonstrate the differences in how organizational identity, brands, and organizational activity co-construct each other in various types of organizations, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the process of identity production and reproduction as well as the effects of organizational structure and culture on that process.

Secondly, since my study of Virginia Tech is limited to an examination of the internal effects of branding and organizational identity, future studies should consider incorporating external audiences and the dissemination and consumption of branded texts by those audiences. From an activity theory perspective, these studies could focus on the genres used to communicate certain aspects of identity, or they could consider various identity-rhetorics as genres in themselves (as I briefly suggest in Chapter 5), operationalized over time to accomplish specific goals for organizations in different social and rhetorical contexts. These studies could take the form of ethnographic studies of professional communicators and the texts they use

and create in their daily work. Other studies in this vein could also analyze the ways in which different audiences (external and internal) interpret and respond to aspects of organizational brands, extending the connection between identification and activity beyond the organization itself.

Finally, since one implication of my findings is the need to incorporate a “political awareness” of the social structures of the workplace into professional communication classrooms, future studies could explore the most effective classroom practice for doing so. These could be brand-centered, or focused on other aspects of workplace culture and communication. Either way, these studies could include evaluation of classroom activities and assignments, or they could be best practice information for developing scenarios and case studies that require students to navigate a complex organizational and social structure. These types of studies would help inspire professional communication teachers to develop these oftentimes difficult and time-consuming activities, providing students with the skills to go beyond critical consumers of texts to becoming critical producers.

Conclusion

As I have shown here, Virginia Tech’s official, leadership-sponsored brand is a hegemonic structure of organizational identity that the university’s leadership works to ensure is continually reproduced on campus. That structure, however, is not impenetrable. The cases included in this dissertation have demonstrated that members of the university community have the agency to contribute to that structure through rhetoric—by choosing and encouraging identification with the most effective versions of the organization’s identity for their own

purposes, just as leadership reproduces the brand by encouraging identification with its own versions of the organization's identity. In both situations, that process of identification leads to a state of consubstantiality that shapes organizational practice.

For scholars, practitioners, and students of professional communication, the findings of this dissertation mean that the identity-related texts we produce have a potential for great impact on the organizations where we work and do our research. Therefore, we must be careful to honor the multitudes of voices—and identities—that our organizations represent. Those of us who are involved in the creation, maintenance, and communication of branding initiatives have a responsibility to ensure that those brands do not become overly hegemonic in their efforts to create unity because that unity can become a fragile thing unless it is supported by the many voices that form our organizational identities.

Works Cited

- Albert, Stuart, and David A. Whetten. "Organizational Identity." *Organizational Identity: A Reader*. Ed. Mary Jo Hatch & Majken Schultz. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 89–118. Print.
- Alessandri, Sue Westcott, Sung-Un Yang, and Dennis F Kinsey. "An Integrative Approach to University Visual Identity and Reputation." *Corporate Reputation Review* 9.4 (2006): 258–270.
- Alvesson, Mats. "Knowledge Work: Ambiguity, Image and Identity." *Human Relations* 54.7 (2001): 863–886. Web. 4 July 2011.
- Ashforth, Blake E., and Fred Mael. "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *The Academy of Management Review* 14.1 (1989): 20–39.
- Atakan, M. G. Serap, and Tutku Eker. "Corporate Identity of a Socially Responsible University—A Case from the Turkish Higher Education Sector." *Journal of Business Ethics* 76 (2007): 55–68.
- Athletic Practice Facility Site Evaluation Committee. *Final Report*. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2012. Web. July 2012.
- Baker, Michael J., and John M.T. Balmer. "Visual Identity: Trappings or Substance?" *European Journal of Marketing* 31.5/6 (1997): 366–382. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.
- Balmer, John M.T. "Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and Corporate Marketing: Seeing Through the Fog." *European Journal of Marketing* 35.3/4 (2001): 248–291. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.
- Barthes, Roland. "Rhetoric of the Image." *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World*. Ed. Carolyn Handa. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004. 152–163. Print.

- Bawarshi, Anis S., and Mary Jo Reiff. *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, 2010. Web. 17 Apr. 2011.
- Bennett, Roger, and Rehnuma Ali-Choudhury. "Prospective Students' Perceptions of University Brands: An Empirical Study." *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 19.1 (2009): 85–107. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.
- Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1.1 (1968): 1–14. Print.
- Blakesley, David. "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Ed. Charles A. Hill & Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. 111–133. Print.
- Blythe, Stuart, Jeffrey T Grabill, and Kirk Riley. "Action Research and Wicked Environmental Problems: Exploring Appropriate Roles for Researchers in Professional Communication." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 22.3 (2008): 272–298. Print.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. Print.
- . *Attitudes Toward History*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1959. Print.
- . "Terministic Screens." *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966. 44–61. Print.
- Carlson, Curtis. "Universities and the Business Practice of Marketing." *The Business of Higher Education: Marketing and Consumer Interests*. Ed. John C. Knapp & David J. Siegel. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009. 21–45. Print.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. "Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University." *Carnegie Classifications*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d. Web. 6 March 2013.

Charmaz, Kathy. "Grounded Theory in the 21st Century." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Ed. Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005. 507–535. Print.

Cheney, George. *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1991. Print.

Cintron, Ralph. "Democracy and Its Limitations." *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen Scholars and Public Engagement*. Ed. John M. Ackerman & David J. Coogan. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2010. 98–116. Print.

Condit, Celeste Michelle. "The Functions of the Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar." *Communication Quarterly* 33.4 (1985): 284–299. Print.

Corley, Kevin G. "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture? Hierarchical Differences in Perceptions of Organizational Identity and Change." *Human Relations* 57.9 (2004): 1145–1177. Web. 2 Sept. 2012.

Csaba, Fabian Faurholt, and Anders Bengtsson. "Rethinking Identity in Brand Management." *Brand Culture*. Ed. Jonathan E. Schroeder & Miriam Salzer-Mörling. London: Routledge, 2006. 118–135. Print.

Doheny-Farina, Stephen. "Creating a Text/Creating a Company: The Role of a Text in the Rise and Decline of a New Organization." *Textual Dynamics in the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*. Ed. Charles Bazerman & James Paradis. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991. 306–335. Print.

- Doheny-Farina, Stephen, and Lee Odell. "Ethnographic Research on Writing: Assumptions and Methodology." *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*. Ed. Lee Odell & Dixie Goswami. New York: Guilford, 1985. 503–536. Print.
- Doyle, Peter, and Gerald D. Newbould. "A Strategic Approach to Marketing a University." *Strategic Planning, Marketing & Public Relations, and Fund-Raising in Higher Education: Perspectives, Readings, and Annotated Bibliography*. Ed. Cynthia C. Ryans & William L. Shanklin. London: Scarecrow, 1986. 16–39. Print.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Faber, Brenton D. *Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, Identity*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. Print.
- . "Creating Rhetorical Stability in Corporate University Discourse: Discourse Technologies and Change." *Written Communication* 20.4 (2003): 391–425. Web. 9 July 2012.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity, 1992. Print.
- . *Language and Power*. 2nd ed. Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001. Print.
- Fife, Jonathan D. "Foreward." *Marketing in Higher Education*. Ed. Stanley M. Grabowski. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1981. i. Print.
- Fisher, Walter R. "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration." *Communication Monographs* 52 (1985): 347–367. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed & trans by. Colin Gordon. New York: Vintage Books, 1980. Print.

- . *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage Books, 1972. Print.
- Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- . *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 1984. Print.
- Gioia, Dennis A., Majken Schultz, and Kevin G. Corley. "Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability." *Academy of Management Review* 25.1 (2000): 63–81.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm G. Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 1967. Print.
- Hatch, Mary Jo, and Majken Schultz. "Relations Between Organizational Culture, Identity and Image." *European Journal of Marketing* 31.5/6 (1997): 356–365. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.
- Hauser, Gerard A. *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory*. 2nd ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2002. Print.
- . *Vernacular Voices*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1999. Print.
- Heath, Robert L. *Management of Corporate Communication: From Interpersonal Contacts to External Affairs*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994. Print.
- Henry, Jim. "Writing Workplace Cultures-Technically Speaking." *Critical Power Tools: Technical Communication and Cultural Studies*. Ed. J. Blake Scott, Bernadette Longo, & Katherine V. Wills. Albany: State U of New York, 2006. 199–218. Print.

- Herndl, Carl G. "Teaching Discourse and Reproducing Culture: A Critique of Research and Pedagogy in Professional and Non-Academic Writing." *Central Works in Technical Communication*. Ed. Johndan Johnson-Eilola & Stuart A. Selber. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. 220–231. Print.
- Herndl, Carl G., and Adela C. Licona. "Shifting Agency: Agency, Kairos, and the Possibilities of Social Action." *Communicative Practices in Workplaces and the Professions: Cultural Perspectives on the Regulation of Discourse and Organizations*. Ed. Mark Zachry & Charlotte Thralls. Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2007. 133–153. Print.
- Hill, Charles A. "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Ed. Charles A. Hill & Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. 24–39. Print.
- Humphreys, Michael, and Andrew D. Brown. "Narratives of Organizational Identity and Identification: A Case Study of Hegemony and Resistance." *Organization Studies* 23.3 (2002): 421–447. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.
- Isaksson, Maria, and Poul Erik Flyvholm Jørgensen. "Communicating Corporate Ethos on the Web: The Self-Presentation of PR Agencies." *Journal of Business Communication* 47.2 (2010): 119–140. Web. 12 Aug. 2011.
- Jasinski, James. *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001. Print.
- Keller, George. "Examining What Works in Strategic Planning." *Planning and Management for a Changing Environment: A Handbook on Redesigning Postsecondary Institutions*. Ed. Martin W. Peterson, David D. Dill, & Lisa A. Mets. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 158–170. Print.

Kotler, Philip, and Patrick E. Murphy. "Strategic Planning for Higher Education." *The Journal of Higher Education* 52.5 (1981): 470–489. Print.

Larson, Gregory S., and Gerald L. Pepper. "Strategies For Managing Multiple Organizational Identifications: A Case of Competing Identities." *Management Communication Quarterly* 16.4 (2003): 528–557. Web. 8 Sept. 2010.

Lauer, Larry D. "Marketing the Academy." *The Business of Higher Education: Marketing and Consumer Interests*. Ed. John C. Knapp & David J. Siegel. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009. 47–56. Print.

Lerpold, Lin et al. "Introduction." *Organizational Identity in Practice*. Ed. Lin Lerpold et al. New York: Routledge, 2007. 1–11. Print.

Maassen, Peter A., and Henry P. Potman. "Strategic Decision Making in Higher Education An Analysis of the New Planning System in Dutch Higher Education." *Higher Education* 20 (1990): 393–410. Print.

MacNealy, Mary Sue. "Empirical Research in the Humanities." *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. 1–14. Print.

Melewar, T.C., and Sibel Akel. "The Role of Corporate Identity in the Higher Education Sector: A Case Study." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 10.1 (2005): 41–57. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

Melewar, TC, J. Saunders, and John M.T. Balmer. "Cause, Effect and Benefits of a Standardised Corporate Visual Identity System of UK Companies Operating in Malaysia." *European Journal of Marketing* 35.3/4 (2001): 414–427. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

- Messaris, Paul. *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997. Print.
- Miller, Carolyn R. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70.2 (1984): 151–167.
- . "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre." *Genre and the New Rhetoric*. Ed. Aviva Freedman & Peter Medway. London: Taylor & Francis, 1995. 67–78. Print.
- Morrill, Richard L. *Strategic Leadership: Integrating Strategy and Leadership in Colleges and Universities*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007. Print.
- Mumby, Dennis K. "The Political Function of Narrative in Organizations." *Communications Monographs* 54 (1987): 113–127. Web. 7 Sept. 2012.
- . "The Problem of Hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for Organizational Communication Studies." *Western Journal of Communication* 61.4 (1997): 343–375.
- National Science Foundation. "R&D expenditures at universities and colleges, ranked by FY 2005 R&D expenditures: FY 1998–2005." N.p.:National Science Foundation, 2006. Web. 6 March 2013.
- Nelson, Cary, and Stephen Watt. *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Newkirk, Thomas. "The Narrative Roots of the Case Study." *Methods and Methodologies in Composition Research*. Ed. Gesa Kirsch & Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1992. 130–152. Print.
- O'Neil, Julie. "The Challenge of Promoting a Cohesive Institutional Identity: An Investigation of the Impact of External Audiences, Task Specialization, and the Overall Organization." *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing* 11.2 (2003): 21–42. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

Pastor, John D. "Virginia Tech Ranking for Research Spending Jumps; Remains Tops in Virginia."

Virginia Tech News. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 7 Dec. 2012.

Perkins, Jane, and Nancy Blyler. "Introduction: Taking a Narrative Turn in Professional

Communication." *Narrative and Professional Communication*. Ed. Jane Perkins & Nancy

Blyler. Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999. 1–34. Web. 30 Aug. 2012.

Ramasubramanian, Srividya, J.F. Gyure, and N.M. Mursi. "Impact of Internet Images:

Impression-Formation Effects of University Web Site Images." *Journal of Marketing Higher Education* 12.2 (2002): 20. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

Ran, Bing, and P. Robert Duimering. "Imaging the Organization: Language Use in Organizational

Identity Claims." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 21.2 (2007): 155–187.

Web. 21 June 2012.

Riketta, M. "Organizational Identification: A Meta-analysis." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 66.2

(2005): 358–384. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

Russell, D.R. "Writing and Genre in Higher Education and Workplaces: A Review of Studies That

Use Cultural–Historical Activity Theory." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 4.4 (1997): 224–237.

Web. 17 Apr. 2011.

Schmidtlein, Frank A., and Toby H. Milton. "College and University Planning: Perspectives from

a Nationwide Study." *Planning for Higher Education* 17.3 (1988): 1–19. Print.

Scott, J. Blake, Bernadette Longo, and Katherine V. Wills. "Introduction: Why Cultural Studies."

Critical Power Tools: Technical Communication and Cultural Studies. Ed. J. Blake Scott,

Bernadette Longo, & Katherine V. Wills. Albany: State U of New York, 2006. 1–24. Print.

- Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press
New York, 2006. Web. 17 Apr. 2011.
- Seiler, John. "About." *Save Stadium Woods*. Save Stadium Woods, Oct. 2012. Web. January
2012.
- Sewell, Jr., William H. "A Theory of Structure: Duality , Agency, and Transformation." *American
Journal of Sociology* 98.1 (1992): 1–29. Print.
- Shaver, Lisa. "Using Key Messages to Explore Rhetoric in Professional Writing." *Journal of
Business and Technical Communication* 25.2 (2011): 219–236. Print.
- Shirley, Robert C. "Identifying the Levels of Strategy for a College or University." *Long Range
Planning* 16.3 (1983): 92–98.
- Sillince, John A. A. "Resources and Organizational Identities: The Role of Rhetoric in the
Creation of Competitive Advantage." *Management Communication Quarterly* 20.2 (2006):
186–212. Web. 15 Mar. 2012.
- Slack, Jennifer Daryl, David James Miller, and Jeffrey Doak. "The Technical Communicator as
Author: Meaning, Power, Authority." *Central Works in Technical Communication*. Ed.
Johndan Johnson-Eilola & Stuart A. Selber. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. 160–174. Print.
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges. *Principles of
Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. 5th ed. Decatur, GA: SACS
Commission on Colleges, 2011. Web. Feb. 2012.
- Spinuzzi, Clay. *Tracing Genres Through Organizations: A Sociocultural Approach to Information
Design*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2003. Web. 28 Mar. 2011.

Stake, Robert E. "Qualitative Case Studies." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Ed. Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005. 443–466. Print.

Stallworth Williams, Linda. "The Mission Statement: A Corporate Reporting Tool With a Past, Present, and Future." *Journal of Business Communication* 45.2 (2008): 94–119. Web. 19 Oct. 2011.

Stratman, J. F. et al. "Risk Communication, Metacommunication, and Rhetorical Stases in the Aspen-EPA Superfund Controversy." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 9.1 (1995): 5–41. Web. 24 Jan. 2013.

"Stroubles Creek Restoration." *Center for Watershed Studies at Virginia Tech*. Department of Biological Systems Engineering, n.d. Web. 23 Jan 2013.

Swales, John M., and Priscilla S. Rogers. "Discourse and the Projection of Corporate Culture: The Mission Statement." *Discourse & Society* 6.2 (1995): 223–242. Print.

Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Virginia Tech. *A Plan for a New Horizon: Envisioning Virginia Tech 2012-2018*. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2012. Web. March 2013.

---. "Brand Platform." *Branding and Identity*. Virginia Tech Office of University Relations, n.d. Web. Sept. 2012.

---. *Virginia Tech Identity Standards and Style Guide*. Virginia Tech Office of University Relations, 2008. Web. 18 April 2010.

"Virginia Tech Principles of Community." *Diversity*. Virginia Tech, March 2005. Web. March 2013.

- Watson, Tony J. "Rhetoric, Discourse and Argument in Organizational Sense Making: A Reflexive Tale." *Organization Studies* 16.5 (1995): 805–821. Web. 7 Sept. 2012.
- Waymer, Damion. "Connecting Organizations and Their Employee Publics." *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II*. Ed. Robert L. Heath, Elizabeth L. Toth, & Damion Waymer. New York: Routledge, 2009. 216–232. Print.
- Weiss, Robert S. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press, 1994. Print.
- Welsh, John F., William J. Nunez, and Joseph Petrosko. "Assessing and Cultivating Support for Strategic Planning: Searching for Best Practices in a Reform Environment." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 31.6 (2006): 693–708. Web. 25 Feb. 2013.
- Whaley, Sherrie R. "Virginia Tech to Host Human-Animal Bond Symposium May 3." *Virginia Tech News*. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 7 March 2013.
- Williams, Raymond. "Hegemony." *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised Ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. 144–146. Print.
- Winn, Wendy. "'Proof' in Pictures: Visual Evidence and Meaning Making in the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Controversy." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 39.4 (2009): 351–379. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.
- Winsor, Dorothy A. "Genre and Activity Systems: The Role of Documentation in Maintaining and Changing Engineering Activity Systems." *Written Communication* 16.2 (1999): 200–224. Web. 17 Apr. 2011.
- . "Using Writing to Structure Agency: An Examination of Engineers' Practice." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 15.4 (2006): 411–430. Print.

---. *Writing Power: Communication in an Engineering Center*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2003. Print.

Witten, Marsha. "Narrative and the Culture of Obedience at the Workplace." *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Dennis K. Mumby. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993. 97–118. Print.

Wright, David. "Communication and Cultural Change in University Technology Transfer." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 43.1 (2013): 79-101. Print.

Zachry, Mark. "Management Discourse and Popular Narratives: The Myriad Plots of Total Quality Management." *Narrative and Professional Communication*. Ed. Jane Perkins & Nancy Blyler. Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999. 107–120. Web. 30 Aug. 2012.

Zemsky, Robert, Susan Shaman, and Daniel B. Shapiro. *Higher Education as Competitive Enterprise: When Markets Matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. Print.

Appendix A

Links to Artifacts

- Branding and Identity – Virginia Tech University Relations
<http://www.branding.unirel.vt.edu/>
- *Virginia Tech Identity Standards & University Style Guide*
<http://www.branding.unirel.vt.edu/style-guide.pdf>
- Long Range Plan (*A Plan for a New Horizon: Envisioning Virginia Tech, 2012-2018*)
<https://www.president.vt.edu/strategic-plan/2012-plan/2012-strategic-plan.pdf>
- Long Range Planning Blog
<https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/vtstrategic/>
- The Petition to Save Virginia Tech’s Stadium Woods from Development
<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/vtstadiumwoods/>
- Friends of Stadium Woods Website
<http://www.savestadiumwoods.com/>
- Save Stadium Woods Facebook Group
<https://www.facebook.com/StadiumWoods>
- Save Stadium Woods YouTube Video
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePGWN4vglyw&feature=youtu.be>
- “Invent the Future” Facebook Group
<https://www.facebook.com/virginiatechinvents?ref=ts&fref=ts>
- “Impact” campaign
<http://www.impact.unirel.vt.edu/>

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

- I. Brief Project Overview
 - a. Studying how the discourse surrounding a university's identity rhetorically shapes strategy and policy.
 - b. First, I have to define that identity, which is the stage I'm in now.
 - c. Talking to students, faculty, and staff in interviews and focus groups, leading to a larger survey.
 - d. So, as a key informant, I just want to have a conversation about your perceptions of the university's identity and get some recommendations for other students who may be interested in participating as key informants or in focus groups.
- II. Consent Form overview (focus on audio recording and difficulty of concealing identity)
- III. Interview
 1. Tell me about yourself what you do here at Tech?
 - a. What do you teach/study?
 - b. How long have you been at Virginia Tech?
 2. What brought you to Virginia Tech?
 3. What was your first impression of the university?
 - a. Give me an example, a story that illustrates that first impression.
 4. Does that first impression still hold true?
 - a. Why or why not?
 5. If you were describing Virginia Tech to a friend who was considering working/going to school here, how would you describe it?
 - a. What types of stories would you tell about your time at Tech to support that description?
 6. Would you describe it differently to someone else? Someone who wasn't considering working/going to school here?
 - a. Why or Why not?
 7. What do you like best about working/going to school at Virginia Tech?
 8. What do you like least about working/going to school at Virginia Tech?
 9. How would you classify Virginia Tech among colleges and universities in the United States?

- a. What type of institution is it?
 - b. Who would you consider its peer institutions? Why?
10. What do you think differentiates Virginia Tech from those schools similar to it?
11. What values do you believe Virginia Tech most exemplifies?
- a. Give me an example, a story that illustrates those aspects.
12. With that in mind, in your own words, what do you feel is the organizational identity of Virginia Tech?
13. Are there any recent issues facing VT where you think this identity is called into question, challenged, or is particularly apparent?
14. Show Branding Platform and ask for “Thoughts.”
15. Who else would you suggest I talk to? Faculty? Staff? Students?

Appendix C

Coding Scheme

The Brand

Academically Energized
Bold Spirit
Brand Drivers
 Challenging Academics
 Faculty Experts
 Groundbreaking Research
 Service
Technological Leadership

Brand Promise
 Innovation
 Quality
 Results (Impact)
Culturally Inclusive
Entrepreneurial Approach
High Achieving People
Invent the Future

Land-Grant Values
 Local and Global Impact
 Open Boundaries of
 Study and Research
 Outreach
 Research University
 Teaching and Learning

From Interviews

Advising Issues
Agricultural School
Applied Research
April 16
Arts
Athletics (Football School)
Beautiful Location
Collaboration
Comprehensive University
Conservative
Decentralized
Excellent Student Support
 Programs
Faculty Development
Global Preparation
Good Ol' Boys Power
 Structure
Graduate Education Focus
Great Food
Health Sciences
Hokie Respect
Hokie Stone
Hokies

Humanities
Interdisciplinarity
International Collaboration
International Students
Job Focused
Large School
Market-Driven Focus
Maroon & Orange - Visual
 Identity
Mentoring
Military History
Money Problems (Funding
 Issues)
Pride & Loyalty
Principles of Community
Public University
Putting Knowledge to Work
Pylons
Regional Focus
Research Rankings Focus
School Spirit
Slow to Change
Small Feeling

Social Science
Southern Values
STEM
Student Input
Student-Centered Learning
Supportive and Caring
 People
Sustainability
Too Much Focus on Research
Tradition
Traditional Students
We Are Virginia Tech.