
Using public relations to address diversity issues on campus: A case study in goals, image and relationships

Brigitta R. Brunner and Mary Helen Brown

Auburn University, Alabama

Abstract

This paper offers a case study of how one United States university handled diversity issues. Specifically, relationships, organisational goals, and institutional image are examined. The case study demonstrates several ways in which the depicted university has failed to use typical 'best practice' public relations techniques successfully in order to build meaningful relationships with publics, achieve organisational goals, and create a positive institutional image. Suggestions are made for how institutions of higher learning around the globe can learn from this situation and more wisely use their public relations efforts.

Introduction

This case study examines how one United States university handled diversity issues in relationship building, organisational goals and image. Campus events were studied with the aim of exploring public relations and goal attainment in terms of diversity. Relevant artefacts, items internal to the university and those published in local newspapers, were examined, including announcements, memos, news articles, and reports.¹ The authors offer suggestions about relationship management, organisational goals, and image, based on the actions taken by the university's administration.

¹ This case is presented as a generic incident for educational purposes, and the case study university is not identified. Therefore the media articles and internal memos referred to are not referenced in this article in the usual manner, as to do so would have publicly identified people involved. A full list of references is available from the authors upon request.

Public relationships

A key to organisational success in the 21st century is relationships (DeSanto & Garner, 2001). Managers use communication, especially public relations, as a strategic tool to build and maintain relationships (Ledingham, 2003). Attention to relationships helps reduce organisation-public conflicts and also fosters cooperation between an organisation and its constituents (Huang, 2001).

The term 'relationship' is used by practitioners as an element in public relations. However, public relations literature suggests it stands for "a complex phenomenon for which few practitioners and scholars share a common definition and set of measurements" (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, p. 86). Ferguson (1984) identified the need for research in this area more than 20 years ago; yet studies have been conducted only in recent years (Sallott, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2000).

Ferguson (1984), Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997) and Grunig and Huang (2000) have attempted to demystify the term relationship, developing factors that measure relationship outcomes. Relational attributes, such as dynamic versus static; open vs. closed; degree of satisfaction; distribution of power; and mutual understanding, agreement, and consensus, could be used to measure and define organisational relationships. Broom et al. (1997) developed a three-stage model of relationships that includes relationship concepts, antecedents to relationships, and consequences of relationships. Relationship antecedents are defined as "social and cultural norms, collective perceptions and expectations, needs for resources, perceptions of uncertain environments, and legal/voluntary necessity"

(Broom et al., 1997 p. 96). Antecedents explain why organisations enter into relationships with certain publics (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Consequences of relationships include goal achievement, dependency/loss of autonomy, and routine and institutionalised behaviours (Broom et al., 1997). In other words, consequences are outcomes used to evaluate a public relations programme (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Image

Image is a controversial term in public relations. Grunig (1994) stated that he never uses the term image, because “I did not know what the term really means” (p. 124). Image is an umbrella phrase related to corporate communications that implies that public relations deals with ‘unreality’. Image suggests that public relations practitioners manipulate, polish, project, tarnish, dent, bolster, and/or boost something that is not real. However, because image combines the symbolic (perceptions and attitudes formed about an organisation by publics) and the organisation’s behavioural relationships (interaction between organisations and their publics), it remains a subject of inquiry. Image may affect reputation in a positive or negative fashion (Grunig, 1994).

Image depends on organisational activities: how management and publics interact, how the organisation is doing financially, how leaders behave, and the organisation’s day-to-day operations. Image also results from all the messages sent by an organisation, both intentional and unintentional, as well as social, historical, and lived experiences within the enterprise (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001). These elements comprise the total impression that the entity makes on a public’s perceptions of an organisation (Dichter, 1985; Druckenmiller, 1993; Theus, 1993). It could be said then that image consists of all the conclusions different publics make about an enterprise after being exposed to public relations efforts (Sauerhaft & Atkins, 1989). Efforts to enhance image should reflect the organisation’s mission, culture, values and personality to work well (and cultivating a

positive image is a proactive way of preparing for bad times (Wan & Schell, 2007).

Image and universities

Few researchers have examined the importance of image to educational institutions, but the concept is clearly important (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003). Universities depend on their image to survive (Kazoleas et al., 2001). Theus (1993) argues that one of a university’s most important assets is its image. Here, image is defined by “entering-student test scores, quality of faculty, expenditures per student, size of endowment, number of volumes in the library, admissions selectivity, volume of gifts and grants, accomplishments of alumni, quality of facilities, size of operating budget, peer rankings, reputation for innovation, and quality of leadership” (Theus, 1993, p. 281).

Publics such as legislators, students, and faculty consider image when making choices about resource allocation, education, and employment. Universities and colleges are similar to businesses because they use public relations, marketing, lobbying, and image to acquire resources (Dill, 1982; Theus, 1993). Universities attempt to communicate the benefits and values of attending that particular institution to potential students and show how they differ from others; they try to demonstrate their strengths while paying attention to students’ wants and needs (Washburn & Petroschius, 2004; Pulley, 2003). A university builds its image and relationships through public relations and other means, believing that a strong image makes for a strong relationship with its publics (Pulley, 2003). Once a positive image and a strong, committed relationship exist, the university is considered more apt to attract the best students and faculty and also the resources it needs to operate.

Image and institutional leaders

Leaders personify an organisation’s principles and values (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Therefore, leaders’ actions and image influence their enterprise’s image (Druckenmiller, 1993; Gaines-Ross, 2000; Garbett, 1988; Mazur, 1999). As such, organisations are personified by their leaders and those leaders help to shape an institution’s image (Gitlin, 1980; Grunig,

1994; Williams & Moffitt, 1997). The CEO may become the organisation symbolically to some constituents, personifying its values and goals (Pincus, Rayfield, & Debonis, 1991; Gray, 1986; Grunig, 1994).

Organisational goals and image

Ideally, an organisation's goals reflect its values. Knowing an organisation's goals is key to understanding its culture, values, and priorities, and its goals often shape its public relations strategies. In his classic work, *Administrative Behavior*, Herbert Simon points out that discussing any aspect of organisation theory without "introducing some concept of 'organisation goal'" (Simon, 1976, p. 257) is difficult. Many approaches to enterprises consider the mesh between goals and values to be instrumental in how smoothly an organisation operates and how well it fulfills its purpose. Goals reflect a "desired state of affairs which the organisation attempts to realize" (Etzioni, 1964, p. 6), functioning to give a sense of direction by envisioning the organisation's purpose and ends (Perrow, 1969; 1972; Etzioni, 1975). Goals also reduce uncertainty by orienting organisational and individual actions (McComb, 1995). In other words, goals help to eliminate or reduce stress by reducing ambiguity, providing guidelines for behaviours, and helping members learn what sorts of behaviour are acceptable.

Goals also provide legitimacy by projecting a positive image for the organisation, serving "front" purposes as the entity promotes an appropriate image of itself (Goffman, 1959). Thus, goals serve as standards by which both organisational members and outsiders assess success, learning about enterprise success by evaluating its performance against goals. However, precisely identifying an organisation's goals or values is not always simple. Goals are not necessarily unified, and a distinction should be made between an organisation's official and operative goals (Perrow, 1969). Official goals are the formal, stated goals of the enterprise used for public purposes, require few resources, and are embodied in the form of the enterprise

charter, reports, public relations campaigns, or so on. Such goals are often general and do not mandate the specific behaviours that lead to achievement (Locke & Somers, 1987).

In contrast, operative goals are the actual future states toward which a majority of the organisation's means, resources, and major commitments is directed. These end states demonstrate what the enterprise is trying to do, serving to direct members' behaviour. They may more accurately reflect organisational values and may "support, be irrelevant to, or subvert official goals" (Perrow, 1969, p. 67). Thus a disconnect may occur between an organisation's official, stated goals and its unofficial, real operative goals. In case of conflict, operative goals get priority. Any such disconnect is likely to cause confusion and negatively impact on morale and motivation for individuals and constituents who support the official goals (Martin, 1989; Galbraith & Buckman, 1993).

Connecting relationships, image, and organisational communication

Conversations between organisations and their publics are needed to reach mutual satisfaction in their relationship (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; 2000). Any such dialogue may help both public relations researchers and practitioners develop strategies to build supportive relationships while enhancing image (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Further, enterprise history needs to be taken into account, because publics' perceptions of organisations are based on the history of their interaction (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Image also plays a part in relationship building. Reputation, image, and brand are affected by organisation-public relationships. The more positive the relationship an organisation has with its publics, the more likely these publics are to have a positive image of the organisation (Grunig & Hung, 2002).

Grunig and Hung also suggest that what an organisation does has a stronger affect on image and relationships than what it says (2002), so that enterprise behaviour, such as from its managers, that is perceived as negative, will foster a negative public image (Grunig & Hung, 2002). Since organisational behaviour

affects image, public relations efforts must manage organisation behaviour in order to manage image and relationships (Grunig & Hung, 2002). In this way, reputation and image provide a context for understanding the behaviours of an organisation's publics and also the ability of an enterprise to achieve its goals. Effective organisations meet their goals because they pick goals that are valued by their publics and because they build relationships with these publics. Positive organisation-public relationships also save resources because they help prevent crises, issues, and bad publicity (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992).

Diversity issues in higher education

Successful relationship management in terms of diversity is of particular concern because of the world's changing demographics. If a university chooses to ignore diversity, it risks losing a strategic opportunity, and possibly incurs many costs. "Diversity is one of the largest, most urgent challenges facing higher education today. It is also one of the most difficult challenges colleges have ever faced" (Levine, 1991, p. 4). Institutions that have responded to this challenge demonstrate how hard United States' institutions must work to be multiracial yet cohesive (Bensimon & Soto, 1997).

Some institutions include references to diversity as part of their public relations strategy. At the same time, some administrators and faculty members do not recognise the importance of diversity and may consider it a threat (Hallock, 1994). The difference may be reflected in an organisation's official approach to diversity as expressed in its formal goals through its public relations efforts compared with how much it actually values diversity as expressed in its behaviours and policies. Thus, the congruence or lack of congruence between an organisation's stated goals and its actual behaviours makes an interesting point for observation.

Research implies that higher education has a responsibility to lead the way in diversity programmes (Hill, 1991; Rosser, 1990). Individuals in higher education should be the

"carriers of civilisation" and the "engines of change" and challenge overt and covert attempts to limit ethnic diversity (Rosser, 1990, p. 224). Universities must build a society in which access to positions of leadership and respect is not limited by race (Bowen & Bok, 1998). "Institutions of higher education have an obligation, first and foremost, to create the best possible educational environment for the young adults whose lives are likely to be significantly changed during their years on campus" (Gurin, 1999, p. 36). These institutions are microcosms of society at large where issues of justice and society values are learned (Scisney-Matlock, & Matlock, 2001). Students define themselves in relation to others, they experiment with roles, and begin to make commitments to careers, social groups, and relationships (Bowen, 1999; Gurin, 1999).

Changes in demographics may lead to tension between differing cultural norms and values (Allen, 1995; Henderson, 1992). Some researchers contend that segregation still exists in the United States in part because education asks students to adapt to existing political, social and economic systems rather than change them (Gordon, 2004). As higher education moves further into the 21st century, learning about and interacting with diverse people will be increasingly more important (Rowan, 1997). Universities must make campuses places where students from different backgrounds can take part in conversations and share experiences to help them to understand others' perspectives and become better citizens of the nation and world (Adelma, 1997; Gurin, 1999).

Multicultural education and the global society

Diversity is an important aspect of workforce management in a global society, and successful relationship management is of particular concern because changing demographics bring challenges and opportunities. One way that these opportunities and challenges can be addressed is with multicultural education. Multicultural education was introduced in the United States in an attempt to reform educational processes that hindered minorities and reinforced discrimination and stereotypes (Morey, 2000).

Multicultural education suggests that the ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of individuals are necessary for learning (Mushi, 2004). Therefore, multiculturalism in the United States exists to help students succeed in a pluralistic society much as intercultural education does in Europe (Banks, 1995). Multicultural education focuses on diversity within a nation, while global and international education focus on relationships among countries (Morey, 2000). These perspectives have developed separately, but are inter-related. For example, both share the goals of developing cross-cultural skills, promotion of social justice, improvement of inter-group relations, and the reduction of prejudice. Students must be prepared for global and multicultural society; they must be competent in their own values and how they can affect attitudes and behaviours. The goals of a university should reflect these values if it intends to nurture successful relationship management within a diverse society (Morey, 2000).

Diversity's link to public relations, image, and goals

Public relations can promote awareness and understanding of diversity issues within enterprises (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). In higher education, organisations need to demonstrate to the student body that trust, commitment, and satisfaction exist in building relationships and in building diversity programmes. Organisations that communicate effectively with publics develop better relationships because mutual understanding has been reached and negative consequences are less likely (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Weick (1979) used the concept of requisite variety to describe the notion that effective organisations have internal and external diversity. Grunig et al. (1992) suggest that requisite variety links diversity with public relations. Relationships are the essence of public relations, and help organisations to build goals. But without understanding and incorporating requisite variety or diversity into public relations, organisations are likely

to fail to build relationships with their constituents (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Similarly, Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) point out that organisations that recognise the importance of diversity become more effective, while Heath (1994) argues that organisations that pay attention to diversity, public relations, and organisational culture are the most efficient and most likely to reach their goals.

Hon and Brunner (2000) identify a continuum that reflects stages of diversity's integration within organisations and the implications for public relations. The lowest level of this continuum is "No commitment to diversity," which is when organisations believe diversity is a non-issue. Next is "weak commitment to diversity," where, enterprises view diversity as meeting legal requirements only. "Diversity awareness" is the next stage, where there is an awareness of the strategic value of diversity management, but often diversity efforts end up being little more than lip service or tokenism. The highest level of the continuum is "diversity as organisational culture." This stage exists in organisations that show a deep commitment to diversity. Such organisations incorporate diversity practices into daily activities so that their commitment to these policies becomes second nature.

Hon and Brunner (2000) suggest a fifth level, "diversity as social responsibility" where diversity is seen as a means to build long-term symmetrical relationships between organisations and their publics because doing so is socially responsible. Such a mindset emphasises public relations' obligation to representing both the organisation and its publics. Enhanced organisational image is regarded a benefit of the link between diversity and public relations, especially in higher education (Hon & Brunner, 2000). For example, one research participant mentioned that attention to diversity in public relations strategies creates a welcoming image for all students, and creating an institutional image that reflects the diversity of campus gives the university a competitive advantage. Such attention to diversity was thought to help encourage the cooperation of the minority population.

Research conducted by Roberson and Park (2005) also links the diversity of an organisation and positive image, while the most competitive organisations have the greatest internal diversity, and incorporation of diversity is a sound business strategy (Vallario, 2006). Organisational diversity is said to improve an organisation's revenues and image because it decreases absences, turnover, complaints and litigation, and increases productivity (Marquez, 2005). Organisations that truly value diversity link it to organisational goals and integrate diversity throughout the organisation and its communications, thereby building positive images and strong relationships with publics (Vallario, 2006). These examples demonstrate the linkages among image, diversity, public relations, and goal achievement.

Method

Case studies are an appropriate way to bridge theory and practice, since they "describe real-life events in such a way as to enhance our understanding and to bolster our insight" (Sypher, 1990, p. 4). Cases provide illustrations of complex organisational and public relations issues and show how theoretical issues are made manifest in practice. Cases place theory in the context of reality, and inform us about ways we can learn from an organisation's mistakes, everyday procedure, best practices, or anything in between (Keyton & Shockley-Zalabak, 2004).

Case studies further illustrate organisational public relations practices, with Taylor (2000), for example, showing that cultural elements in a society impact the way in which its citizens interpret an organisational crisis, while Stokes (2005) demonstrated that the speed and timing of an organisation's public relations effort could decrease negative perceptions of an organisation. Then Kelleher (2003) found that public relations attempts affected the conflict resolution attempts in the 2001 faculty strike at the University of Hawaii.

This paper uses case study techniques to examine how one university handled its diversity efforts in respect of its publicly

stated goals and how these goals may not have reflected the actual events and goals being pursued. Specifically, we are interested in answering the following question: How well do the case study university's official goals, as expressed in formal documents and public relations efforts, match its operative behaviours? The investigators combed institutional and newspaper archives to gather documents, newspaper accounts, memos, reports, and announcements related to the university's diversity issues and initiatives from October 2001 to May 2005. Similar artifacts were collected to determine campus and community reactions to the university's official goals and public relations efforts toward diversity. This paper now examines the case study university's official goals toward diversity in light of actual behaviours in three phases, here labelled: The Halloween Incident, The Diversity Plan, and The New Broom.

The case study university outlines its official goals toward diversity in a number of ways. For example, the graduate and undergraduate bulletin contains information on equal employment, civil rights, and harassment. In addition, the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs presents its vision and outlines several goals:

Vision: Diversity will be a core value at the case study university. The Office for Diversity will offer a comprehensive range of exemplary educational programmes that will foster and sustain an environment that promotes academic excellence, respects differences, and accepts inclusiveness.

Goals: (a) Create, promote and encourage a supportive and friendly campus environment that is welcoming for, and attractive to, people of all races, ethnicity, nationalities, religions, gender, sexual orientation, and those with disabilities; (b) Assist the case study university in its efforts to recruit and retain minority and women faculty, students, and staff at all levels; (c) Develop efforts that enhance external support for diversity programmes and scholarships; (d) Foster a campus community that values diversity through educational, cultural, and social programmes; and (e) Regularly monitor and assess the case study university's diversity efforts for effectiveness,

identify new and better 'best practices' for success, and submit annual reports to a specified senior manager.

Case 1 – The Halloween Incident

On a Halloween evening early in the 21st century, members of Delta Sigma Phi and Beta Theta Pi, traditionally white fraternities, held costume parties and hired local photographers to record the events to be posted on websites for purchase. Among those photos were ones of a Delta Sigma member dressed in a Ku Klux Klan hooded-robe and another dressed as a lynching victim, with black face and a noose around his neck. Members of Beta Theta were dressed in black face, Afro-styled wigs, and purple Omega Psi Phi jerseys. Omega Psi Phi is traditionally a black fraternity. Members of Omega Psi Phi discovered the photos and notified university officials. News of these photos spread quickly and led to questions of taste, and also of the case study university's commitment to diversity and the African-American community.

The case study university's interim president delivered a speech to the Black Student Union and said that the photo images were "shocking and outrageous and they are unacceptable". He then personally apologised for the hurt that was caused by the actions of the fraternity members. He also stated that "this dreadful moment should serve as a positive opportunity for [the case study university] to reaffirm its position on issues of diversity and discrimination, and to embody that position in loud and clear public statements of policy". Within a week, approximately 800 students, faculty and staff gathered on the lawn of the university's administration building for a unity rally. After this, administrators began an investigation into the incident.

The case study university addressed the situation by disbanding the fraternities, which led to legal action on behalf of the fraternities and a lawsuit based on First Amendment rights. The case study university eventually allowed the fraternities to return to normal function upon campus and began a campaign

to instil diversity as a core value of the university.

Case 2 – The Diversity Plan

The following year's State of the University address by the university president stated a goal of the university would be to use education to strengthen its commitment to diversity. He suggested creating a culture and community that would ostracise anyone who discriminated against another. He noted that such change would take time and the efforts of all areas of the university family. He also mentioned corporate support for a consultant and diversity workshops and a senior manager's work to organise a diversity leadership council. He announced that the council would work to develop a diversity plan that would weave "respect for diversity into the very fabric of this institution". And, he mandated that all parts of the university needed to establish programmes to promote diversity.

Diversity was set as a core value and goal for the institution and a deadline was set for the presentation of a diversity plan. The deadline was missed. Soon afterwards, the university held a Town Hall meeting to discuss diversity. One senior manager attending said "We want to make diversity a core value of this university. We want to make sure that there is a consideration and appreciation of diversity in everything that we do here at the case study university". Several months later, the university dedicated a new Center for Diversity and Race Relations. The administration also surveyed faculty, students and staff about diversity issues on campus. The survey attempted to understand diversity as a core value at the university. The university's student transportation buses had the quote "Diversity is a Core Value" emblazoned on their sides.

However, that same year (now almost two years after the Halloween incident), the University Senate raised questions about the lack of minority candidates for a senior management position as related to the university's commitment to diversity. All finalists were white and only one was female. Senators suggested that the search be reopened and efforts made to include African-American candidates. The Senate envisioned an

opportunity to allow for dialogue on the practices being followed regarding diversity as a core value. In an open letter, an African-American faculty member and President of the Black Caucus, and another African-American faculty member and Chair-Elect of the University Senate, questioned the search committee's true commitment to finding qualified minority candidates. They wrote: "Do we REALLY want to see racial, ethnic and gender diversity reflected in our top leadership? ... If diversity is really a 'core value,' given [the case study university's] history, any candidate brought to campus should meet the criteria or at least be able to discuss their track record at their previous institution regarding diversity ... that's if diversity is REALLY a 'core value' here at [the case study university]". Thus, the university's operational practices were perceived by its staff to be at odds with its official goals.

The final Diversity Plan was released to the university community nearly three years after the president called for it and more than two years after his resignation because of an unrelated incident. The plan calls for the university to prepare students for a multicultural society and global society and highlights the goal of inclusivity at the university.

Case 3 – The New Broom

After the original president's resignation, the case study university appointed a new interim president. He was swift to make changes and was even quicker to fire people. For example, the case study university's executive director of affirmative action, an African-American woman, was fired. This action brought more questions regarding the university's commitment to diversity. Soon, five more employees were fired, each claiming racial, sexual or age discrimination as the reasons for their dismissal. In total, the new interim president fired 14 people in his first eight months of office. The university's first African American Senate chair wrote an email to faculty questioning the president's treatment of minorities. He said, "It demonstrates an unhealthy pattern of total

disregard for women and ethnic minorities within the university's central administration". The director of women's studies said the firings marked the "return of the old boys' club".

A few days later, the president announced that he would make diversity initiatives a higher priority on campus. Among the changes he announced were strengthening the role of the senior manager in diversity enhancement programmes and establishing an ombudsman position in the president's office to address diversity issues. "[The case study university] has over the past few years taken a number of initiatives that are instituted to strengthen diversity as a core value. It is now time to organize and focus those multifaceted efforts," he said. Officials said these announcements were not a public relations response to critics despite their coming a mere four days after the Senate chair's email. Even so, faculty continued to ask questions about the administration's commitment to diversity.

Another letter from the chair and chair-elect said that "despite numerous public assurances to the contrary, the leadership of [the case study university] has failed to take convincing actions to promote diversity on campus. Instead of increasing the number of women and ethnic minorities in leadership positions throughout this university, you have reduced their numbers through recent personnel decisions ... These decisions, whatever broader context may be claimed from them, can hardly be said to demonstrate a commitment to diversity on [the case study university's] campus". Newspapers reported that the university withheld a report from its accrediting agency, for six months. The report noted widespread complaints about unfair hiring practices, some related to racial discrimination. In addition, the university's self-report generally neglected any material in regard to its diversity commitment.

The university received some favourable press about diversity matters towards the end of that year. The local newspaper stated that the case study university had an historic increase in its minority enrolment. The freshman class's minority enrolment had grown by 10 percent since the previous year. University officials claimed that the increase was due to increased scholarship and recruitment efforts. However,

the good press did not last long. The same paper soon ran an article claiming that African-American students who applied to the case study university and met the institution's minimum requirements were automatically admitted. Students of other races were not treated equally. Administrators declared that this was a management practice and not a policy. The practice was part of an effort to be in accordance with a federal desegregation ruling and to meet the university's enrolment goals. People wondered once again if the university had a true commitment to diversity or if it was avoiding a lawsuit. Again, operational practices appeared to diverge from official goals.

Discussion

The phases detailed above indicate several official and operative goals, as well as other public relations efforts, that were endorsed by the case study university's administration in an effort to enhance the organisation's image, build relationships, and show comment to diversity. Policies and behaviours reflecting official goals include an investigation into the Halloween incident, mandating diversity as a core value for the university, the institution of a Diversity Leadership Council, the initiation of a Diversity Plan, surveying faculty, students and staff about diversity issues, a Town Hall meeting about diversity issues, the opening of a Center for Diversity and Race Relations, a new position of Associate Provost for Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, an ombudsman position for diversity issues, increased minority enrolments, and statements that the administration would strengthen its commitment to diversity and give diversity initiatives a higher priority.

These official practices are appropriate for any university concerned with diversity, equity, and access. They serve a "front" purpose – to create a favourable image of the university (Goffman, 1959). These practices are ones that any outsider favouring diversity would approve and are imperative for the university's survival. After all, institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to be change agents and to be leaders in inclusiveness (Hill, 1991; Rosser, 1990).

Universities are microcosms of society, where issues of value and justices are learned, and the obligation to provide leadership in diversity issues is paramount (Gurin, 1999; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Scisney-Matlock & Matlock, 2001). Therefore, the university's administration responded to problems involving diversity through official goals and public relations efforts that projected an image of concern.

However, when the university's operative practices are examined, one sees a different picture. The following operative activities were gleaned from the extensive documentation detailing the three phases: disbanding, but then reinstating the fraternities involved in the Halloween incident; setting a deadline for the Diversity Plan but not releasing it until three years later; including no minority candidates in the pool of provost candidates; firing several African-American administrators; holding back an external assessment report with no mention about diversity; and allowing all African-American applicants who met minimum requirements into the university. These practices are argued to subvert the official ones, with a disconnect appearing between what the university says and what it does. Publicly it says that diversity is important, yet its actions suggest otherwise.

This kind of disconnect impedes the university's ability to build trust, and therefore relationships, with its publics. Rather than promoting diversity initiatives and equality, the administration appears to gloss over diversity. Some have suggested that instances of this nature demonstrate that diversity is sometimes seen by organisations as a threat (Hallock, 1994). Claims of diversity may be a smokescreen to cover actual practice (Allen, 1995; Levine, 1991; Myers, 1997). In this case, the operative goals expressed by the university are argued not to demonstrate a real commitment to diversity and the administration may further add to discrimination and segregation by its actions or lack of them (Gordon, 2004).

So, what are the repercussions of this disconnect? First, the university's official goals are less successful because its operative goals do not support them. Lack of congruence in official and operative goals causes confusion

and negative morale, which does little to enhance the institution's image or to build relationships. Negativity is obvious in the sentiments voiced in the question, "Is diversity REALLY a core value of the institution?" This disconnect could also influence recruitment efforts for minority students and faculty, further harming image and relationships. For example, although the university was quick to publicise what it called record minority enrolment, a closer look suggests that these statistics are misleading. The university has more minority students, specifically African-American students; however, it has a larger student body. Over the previous five years, the increase in the number of African-American students in terms of percentage of student body is actually less than formerly.

Ultimately, the university is argued to be not living up to its diversity initiatives and thus not serving its students well (Hill, 1991; Rosser, 1990). Students are being insufficiently prepared to enter a multicultural nation or a global society, two major goals of the university's Strategic Diversity Plan and its official goals relating to diversity. The operative goals show no evidence of requiring students to challenge their own beliefs and values or to accept and appreciate difference, thus do not help reduce prejudice or stereotypes nor teach how to adapt and change. In this way the university appears unable to use public relations and diversity to build relationships.

Global implications

Although this example is from the United States, equity must be a concern for all nations, universities, and international organisations (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). Both United States and European organisations must consider factors such as race and ethnicity, and look at the composition of their workforces in ways that they have not in the past (Vallario, 2006). Similarly, global colleges and universities need to view diversity as important because it is common for them to struggle with equity and access for international students, indigenous people, and other minorities

(Usher & Cervenak, 2005). United States' higher education is considered to be an innovator because the civil rights movement of the 1960s impacted on equity policies around the world (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000; Kauffman, 2003). However, the United States' higher education system must continue to show commitment and success to these policies (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000).

All institutions of higher education can learn from examining their structures, attitudes, cultures, values, and norms related to meeting goals, enhancing image, and building relationship with diverse publics (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000; Kemmis, Marginson, Porter, & Fazal, 2003). Clear goals, continuing action, and performance must be priorities (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). Equity and diversity policies need support, and institutional leaders should show direction, encouragement, and follow-through, modelling equity and diversity goals (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). If institutions of higher education are to embrace diversity, enhance their organisational image, and build relationships, they need to use public relations not to put a 'face' on things but to actually become better organisations.

Higher education also should look beyond its institutional walls and build relations with the community (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000), setting out to strengthen communication and collaboration with students and community (Kemmis, Marginson, Porter, & Fazal, 2003). Joint accountability and action can lead to advancement toward equity and diversity within higher education (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000).

Collecting reliable statistics on ethnicity in higher education is difficult, if not impossible, because of differences in definitions and privacy laws. However, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States can be compared for diversity and equity in education (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). For example, the three are similar in their policies on access to and affordability of education, they share diverse populations, and their social structures and social policies are similar (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000; Kauffman, 2003). Yet although all three nations are working toward greater acceptance of multiculturalism, many barriers

must be crossed (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). For example, policy focusing on access to higher education for indigenous Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) still has problems. Access has been increasing, but retention and success rates are low (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000). The situation is mirrored in the United States for ethnic minority populations such as Native Americans, African Americans and Hispanics.

Diversity and multicultural education also affect institutions of higher education through international student enrolments. The Australian public university system has successfully promoted itself to foreign students, encouraging attendance at Australian universities or joint programmes with overseas institutions (Cohen, 2005). As quoted in Cohen (2005), Standard & Poor states that one in every five students enrolled in higher education in Australia was foreign-born; this ratio is higher than that of any other country.

Yet problems have emerged: 10 universities have been cited by the Australian Universities Quality Agency for insufficient oversight of or poor academic quality at joint programmes not housed in Australia (Cohen, 2005). Plagiarism, instances of lax standards for programmes catering to foreign students, and corruption have been alleged. Despite this, Australian joint programmes still show growth in numbers of international students enrolled. However, image and reputation of the institutions may have been compromised because the universities have moved too quickly and have been careless in attempts to satisfy international students (Cohen, 2005). This implication suggests that the universities involved did not do enough in terms of public relations. These universities may have harmed their images, as has the United States institution discussed in this paper. They may also have disconnects in operational and organisational goals, as does the American institution. And, most importantly, they may not have built relationships with constituents to create an inclusive culture, as in the American institution. This example suggests the need for research that examines how

diversity, image, goals, relationships, and public relations intersect in higher education.

Another way diversity affects institutions of higher learning is the inclusion of native populations. This demographic is especially important to New Zealand and Australia because their indigenous populations are in a period of high growth (Kauffman, 2003). For example, there has been an increase in access and participation in tertiary education by New Zealand Māori, which brings significant economic opportunity to those participating and improves the building of relationships between institutions of higher learning and Māori (Kauffman, 2003). Such gains are significant socially and economically because Māori are integral to New Zealand's future (Kauffman, 2003). Australia's policies and advances in this area are argued to lag behind those of New Zealand and the United States, though the number of indigenous Australians who have earned college degrees in the past decade has grown (Kauffman, 2003).

Well-integrated policies that help minorities access higher education can lead to economic opportunity for the nation as a whole (Kauffman, 2003). They also demonstrate how diversity, goal achievement, image, and relationship building make for good 'business'. Further research is needed into ways in which institutions of higher education can link their diversity initiatives, goals, and public relations.

Conclusion

This article investigated how one university has and has not learned about diversity by examining its official and operative practices, image, and public relationships, then argued that this university failed to use public relations adequately to build relationships. While its official goals projected an image of a progressive university concerned about diversity issues, investigation into its operative behaviours is considered to demonstrate that the status quo remains and change is discouraged. Advertising "Diversity is a core value" on the side of a student transportation bus only serves to draw attention to the goal/behaviour disconnect if that statement does not truly represent those riding inside.

References

- Adelma, C. (1997). Diversity: Walk the walk and talk the talk. *Change*, 29, 34-45.
- Allen, B. J. (1995). "Diversity" and organizational communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 23, 143-155.
- Arpan, L. A., Raney, A. A., & Zivnuska, S. (2003). A cognitive approach to understanding university image. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 8(2), 97-113.
- Banks, J. A. (1995). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. In J.A. Banks and C.A.M. Banks (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bensimon, E. M. & Soto, M. (1997). Can we rebuild civic life without a multiracial university?. *Change*, 29, 42-45.
- Bowen, W. & Bok, D. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Ewing, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bowen, W. G. (1999). A report card on diversity: Lessons for business from higher education. *Harvard Business Review*, 77, 139-151.
- Broom, G. M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (1997). Toward a concept and theory of organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9, 83-98.
- Cohen, D. (2005, Oct. 14). A tarnished reputation. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52, A39-A40.
- Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S. J. (1996). Communication and attributions in a crisis: An experimental study in crisis communication, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8, 279-295.
- DeSanto, B. J. & Garner, R. B. (2001). Strength in diversity. The place of public relations in higher education institutions. In R. L. Heath, & G. Vasquez (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (pp. 543-549). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dichter, E. (1985). What's in an image. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2, 75-81.
- Dill, D. (1982). The management of academic culture: Notes on the management of meaning and social integration. *Higher Education*, 11, 303-320.
- Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Druckenmiller, B. (1993). Crises provide insight on image: Preparations necessary to protect goodwill when times turn bad. *Business Marketing*, 78, 40.
- Esrock, S. & Leichty, G. (1998). Social responsibility and corporate web pages: Self-presentation or agenda setting? *Public Relations Review*, 24 (3), 305-19.
- Esrock, S. & Leichty, G. (2000). Organization of corporate web pages: Publics and functions. *Public Relations Review*, 26 (3), 327-44.
- Etzioni, A. (1964). *Modern organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Etzioni, A. (1975). *A comparative analysis of complex organizations*. New York: Free Press.
- Ferguson, M. A. (1984, August). *Building theory in public relations: Inter organizational relationships as a public relations paradigm*. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, FL.
- Fombrun, C. & Shanley, M. (1990). What's in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33, 233-258.
- Brunner, B.R. & Brown, M. H. (2009). Using public relations to address diversity issues on campus: A case study in goals, image and relationships. *PRism* 6(1): http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html

- Gaines-Ross, L. (2000). CEO reputation: A key factor in shareholder value. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 3, 366-370.
- Galbraith, S., & Buckman, H. (1993). Decision rules used by male and female business students in making ethical value judgments: Another look. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 12, 227-234.
- Garbett, T. (1988). *How to build a corporation's identity and project its image*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *Presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.
- Gordon, M. (2004). Multicultural education: Moving beyond heroes and holidays. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 17, 28-35.
- Gray, J. G. Jr. (1986). *Managing the corporate image: The key to public trust*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Grunig, J. E. (1994). Image and substance: From symbolic to behavioral relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 19, 121-139.
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., & Ehling, W. P. (1992). What is an effective organization? In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management: Contributions to effective organizations* (pp. 65-89). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. (2000). From organization effectiveness to relationship indicators: Antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies, and relationship outcomes. In J. A. Ledingham & S. D. Brunig (Eds.), *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations* (pp. 23-53). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hung, C. J. F. (2002, March). *The effect of relationships on reputation and relationships on reputation: A cognitive, behavioral study*. Paper presented at the Conference of Public Relations Society of America, Educator's Academy, Miami, FL. Available online at: <http://www.crp.uqam.ca/documents/nt/Reputation%20and%20Relationships.doc>
- Gurin, P. (1999). New research on benefits of diversity in college and beyond: An empirical analysis. *Diversity Digest*, 3, 15.
- Hallock, P. (1994). Promoting diversity on campus: Thought to action. *Thought & Action*, 10, 65-78.
- Heath, R.L. (1994). *Management of corporate communication: From interpersonal contacts to external affairs*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Henderson, Z. P. (1992). Educating multicultural groups. *Human Ecology Forum*, 20, 16-19.
- Hill, P. J. (1991). Multiculturalism: The critical philosophy and organizational issues. *Change*, 23, 38-47.
- Holtzhausen, D.R. & Voto, R. (2002). Resistance from the margins: The postmodern public relations practitioner as organizational activist. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14 (1), 57-84.
- Hon, L. C. & Brunner, B. (2000). Diversity issues and public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(4), pp. 309-40.
- Hon, L. & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved January 5, 2008 from: http://www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/1999_MeasuringRelations.pdf
- Huang, Y. H. (2001). OPRA: A cross-cultural, multiple-item scale for measuring organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13, 61- 90.
- Kauffman, P. (2003, February). *Diversity and indigenous policy outcomes: Comparison*
- Brunner, B.R. & Brown, M. H. (2009). Using public relations to address diversity issues on campus: A case study in goals, image and relationships. *PRism* 6(1): http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html

- between four nations*. Proceedings of the third International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations. Ottawa, Ontario: Aboriginal Planet, Foreign Affairs Canada. Retrieved January 5, 2008 from http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/aboriginal/resource/canada/documents/diversityindigpolicy-en.asp
- Kazoleas, D., Kim, Y., & Moffit, M.A. (2001). Institutional image: a case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 6 (24), 205-16.
- Kelleher, T. (2003). PR and conflict: A theoretical review and case study of the 2001 University of Hawaii faculty strike. *Journal of Communication Management*, 8, 184-196.
- Kemmis, S., Marginson, S., Porter, P. Fazal, R. (2003). *Enhancing diversity in Australian higher education (summary)*. Paper prepared by Stephen Kemmis Research & Consulting Pty Ltd, under contract to the University of Western Australia.
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), 21-38.
- Keyton, J., & Shockley-Zalabak, P. (2004). *Case studies for organizational communication*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.
- Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15, 181–198.
- Levine, A. (1991). The meaning of diversity. *Change*, 23, 4-5.
- Locke, E. A., & Somers, R. L. (1987). The effects of goal emphasis on performance on a complex task. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24, 405-412.
- Marquez, J. (2005). SHRM survey shows diversity contributes to bottom line. *Workforce Management*, 84, 8.
- Martin, P. Y. (1989). The moral politics of organizations: Reflections of an unlikely feminist. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 25, 451-471.
- Mazur, L. (1999, June 17). Time to buff the chief executive's global charisma. *Marketing (UK)*, 20.
- McComb, M. (1995). Becoming a travelers aid volunteer: Communication in socialisation and training. *Communication Studies*, 46, 297-317.
- Morey, A. I. (2000). Changing higher education curricula for a global and multicultural world. *Higher Education in Europe*, 25, 25-39.
- Mushi, S. (2004). Multicultural competencies in teaching: A typology of classroom activities. *Intercultural Education*, 15, 180-194.
- Myers, S. L., Jr. (1997). Why diversity is a smoke screen for affirmative action. *Change*, 29, 24-33.
- Perrow, C. (1969). Analysis of goals in complex organizations. In A. Etzioni (Ed.), *Readings on modern organizations* (pp. 65-79). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Perrow, C. (1972). *Complex organizations*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company.
- Pincus, J. D., Rayfield, R. E. & Debonis, J. N. (1991). Transforming CEOs into chief communications officers. *Public Relations Journal*, 47, 22-27.
- Pulley, J. (2003, 19 December). The big squeeze: Colleges are caught between falling revenue sources and rising costs for services. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A1.
- Roberson, Q. M. & Park, H. J. (2005). The competitive advantage of embracing diversity. *Academy of Management Proceedings 2005*. New York: Academy of Management.
- Rosser, J. M. (1990). The role of the university president in realizing the multicultural university. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 34, 223-231.
- Brunner, B.R. & Brown, M. H. (2009). Using public relations to address diversity issues on campus: A case study in goals, image and relationships. *PRism* 6(1): http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html

- Rowan, C. T. (1997, April 30). The need for diversity in education. *Baltimore Sun*, 11A.
- Sallot, L. M., Lyon, L. J., Acosta-Alzuru, C., & Jones, K. O. (2003). From aardvark to zebra: A new millennium analysis of theory development in public relations academic journals. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(1), 27-90.
- Sauerhaft, & Atkins, (1989). *Image wars: Protecting your company when there's no place to hide*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Scisney-Matlock, M. & Matlock, J. (2001). Promoting understanding of diversity through mentoring undergraduate students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 85, 75- 84.
- Simon, H. A. (1976). *Administrative behavior*. New York: The Free Press.
- Skilbeck, M. and Connell, H. (2000, May). *Access and equity in higher education: An international perspective on issues and strategies*. Dublin: The Higher Education Authority.
- Stokes, A. Q. (2005). Metabolife's meaning: A call for the constitutive study of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 556-165.
- Sypher, B. D. (1990). *Case studies in organizational communication*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Taylor, M. (2000). Cultural variance as a challenge to global public relations: A case study of the Coca-Cola scare in Europe. *Public Relations Review*, 26, 277-293.
- Theus, K.T. (1993). Academic reputations: the process of formation and decay. *Public Relations Review*, 19 (3) 277-91.
- Usher, A. & Cervenak, A. (2005). *Global Higher Education Rankings 2005*. Toronto, ON: Education Policy Institute.
- Vallario, C. (2006). Creating an environment for global diversity: global diversity in the workplace is not just a human resources issue, but a business strategy that embraces many elements. *Financial Executive*, 22, p. 50 – 53.
- Wan, H. & Schell, R. (2007). Reassessing corporate image: An examination of how image bridges symbolic relationships with behavioral relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19, 25-46.
- Washburn, J. H., & Petroski, S.M. (2004). A collaborative effort at marketing the university: Detailing a student-centred approach, *Journal of Education for Business*, 80 (1), 35-40.
- Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. (2nd ed.) Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Williams, S. L. & Moffitt, M. A. (1997). Corporate image as an impression formation process: Prioritizing personal, organisational, and environmental audience factors. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9, 237-258.

Copyright statement:

The authors retain copyright in this material, but have granted *PRism* a copyright license to permanently display the article online for free public viewing, and have granted the National Library of Australia a copyright licence to include *PRism* in the PANDORA Archive for permanent public access and online viewing. This copyright option does not grant readers the right to print, email, or otherwise reproduce the article, other than for whatever limited research or educational purposes are permitted in their country. Please contact the author named below if you require other uses.

Author Contact Details

Brigitta R. Brunner, Ph.D.
 Department of Communication & Journalism
 217 Tichenor Hall
 Auburn University, AL 36849-5211

brunnbr@auburn.edu