Applying Brand Management to Higher Education through the use of the Brand Flux Model™ - The Case of Arcadia University

ABSTRACT

Within an increasingly more competitive landscape, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are becoming more marketized and promotionalized; brand building is becoming a strategic administrative goal, yet clear brand management models are lacking. This paper utilizes the Brand Flux Model to assist in tracking the fluxing nature or historical patterns of branding practices, and provides a graphic representation for following changes in branding or changes in position that result in either Reinforcing an existing brand, or Revitalizing, Refocusing, Renaming or Retiring a brand. Through a case analysis of an HEI that eventually underwent a radical renaming, the various phases of the Brand Flux Model are explored and the critical aspect of ongoing brand management efforts are reinforced. The article also highlights why periodic brand audits are necessary to ascertain that what the institution believes it is promoting and projecting is consistent with the actual brand image held by stakeholders and suggests that benchmarking brand management efforts and correlating them with the stage and actions of the brand Flux Model, can assist in understanding branding as a growth platform for service organizations. For practitioners, this study provides a model to assist in brand management and renaming scenarios, and offers insight into channels for optimal corporate strategy. It demonstrates that making changes in branding or changes in position in order to Revitalize, Refocus (rebrand and reposition) or even Rename a brand, and then Reinforce those decisions, is critical to maintaining brand health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2011 there were a total of 4,495 non-profit institutions of higher education in the United States, plus 8,986 degree-granting for-profit institutions. The majority of higher education institutions (63%) are private colleges or universities, while 37% are public, and (62%) are four-year schools compared to two-year (38%) colleges or technical schools (Almanac 2011-2012). In the non-profit HEI sector a competitive market for postsecondary education with multiple stakeholders has developed (Collis, 2001; Dill, 2003; Hoxby, 2002; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Ruch, 2001; Williams, 2012). HEIs are moving toward a model of corporatization (Brookes, 2003; Geiger, 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007), and marketing themselves very aggressively (Katz et al., 1999; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Pusser, 2002; Ruch, 2001). Additionally, a shift from private to public financing of Higher Education, and an ability to obtain non-government funding follows a market approach (Caruana et al., 1998; Dill, 2003; Kinser 2006; Pusser, 2000). A growing body of work focuses on increased "managerialism" in HEI, (Constanti and Gibbs, 2004; Giroux, 1999; Meyer, 2002; Mok, 1997). As students adopt a consumerist approach to their decision-making, with an increasing focus on ROI-type decisions and a concentration on career preparation over 'love of scholarship', (Eggins, 2007; Maringe, 2006; Willmott, 1995) students rate program and price factors as more important than other University marketing mix traditional tools such as websites, prospectuses, and other marcom materials and exhibit purchasing power when deciding which college(s) to attend (Maringe, 2006; Twigg, 2002).

Branding Within Higher Education

As Higher Education Institutions become more marketized, they have become increasingly promotionalized, and brand building gains in importance with names and reputation becoming increasingly important (Finder, 2005; Morphew et al., 2001; Toma, et al., 2005;

Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). The objectification and monetization of academic reputation itself as a brand is a recent phenomenon (Wernick, 2008). Motivation for HEI branding includes: counteracting declining enrollments, reduced retention and overall competition; enhancing image and prestige; increasing financial resources; honoring a philanthropic donor; mission alignment; or signifying a merger between institutions (Cobb, 2001; Koku, 1997; Morphew et al., 2001; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Sevier, 2002; Toma et al., 2005; Williams, 2012).

The operation and successfulness of an HEI, in reality and perception, is largely related to the pursuit of prestige or reputation. Balmer and Liao (2007) suggest HEI branding affords graduates a sense of identification and a way to define themselves, not merely as customers but as life-long organization members of a corporate 'brand community', while Lerman and Garbarino (2002) posit that once a brand name has been released it becomes the psychological property of consumers. In the case of HEIs, this control may be asserted by alumni, faculty, staff and/or students and cause problems when (if) the name is changed. Targeted at multiple stakeholders, the HEI brand is externally focused on positioning and marketing, and internally focused on the organization and promotion of values/culture/vision (Aaker 2004; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). HEIs might interpret reputation and image differently than other service industries, in part since employees are instrumental in constructing the reputation of an HEI by giving it "soul" (Heaney & Heaney, 2008; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Lowrie, 2007; Williams, 2012).

Higher Education is a service industry, with characteristics which include a focus on people, involving largely intangible actions; a lengthy and formal relationship of continuous delivery with the customer; a high level of customization and judgment; relatively narrow fluctuations of demand relative to supply; and single or multiple sites of service delivery methods (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999). Lowrie (2007) explains

that HEI branding must pay attention to the intangibility and inseparability aspects of educational services. As a service brand HEI brands require greater emphasis on internal marketing, in part since all employees become consumer touch-points and service brands play a role in reducing the risk of intangibility (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). Brands are essential to consumers social status (Hamann, et al., 2007), and indeed one aspect of a Higher Education degree is the bestowing of a certain level of social status. Students perceive the image of their HEI in relation to other HEIs (Ivy, 2001) and vast sums are spent by HEIs in the U.S. to increase their ranking in the annual US News and World Report to enhance their image and positioning (Bunzel, 2007; Parameswaran and Glowacka, 1995; Wernick, 2006).

Branding within HEI is not easy due to complex factors such as: diverse stakeholders, internal structures, resistance to change, wide range of majors and programs, sub-branding by schools, majors, facilities, gaps between what students use to make choices and what institutions say in publications, institutional leadership support, and formal communication mechanisms. Additionally, the higher education industry lacks theoretical models of higher education marketing (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Specifically then, the question is whether HEIs are providing what their customers want and need and are they positioning and marketing themselves to this end. If so, their brand is enhanced – if not, brand management is required to achieve those goals (Chapelo, 2007; Edmiston, 2008; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawarda, 2007; Lowrie, 2007; Williams, 2012).

Brand Audit

The brand audit is referred to by Keller (1998, p.373) as a "comprehensive examination of the health of a brand in terms of its sources of brand equity from the perspective of the firm

and the consumer," while Ambler et al., (2002) discuss the need to determine the relevancy of the brand and its associations related to the positioning in the consumer's mind and resistance to attack from competition. Brand life cycle literature describes a cycle from birth of the brand, through growth, maturity, decline and eventually death or retirement of the brand, with brand decay caused by loss of brand salience (Barwise and Meehan, 2004; Lehu, 2006; Jevons et al., 2007). Keller (1998) points out that a problem regarding a declining brand involves the 'breadth' of brand awareness, such that the brand is perceived in a very narrow way and a repositioning may be in order. While brand avoidance is defined by Lee et al. (2008, p.10) occurs "when customers are motivated to reject a brand because of the negative meanings associated with that brand. It can lead to negative brand equity and thus, brands have the potential to become market-based liabilities," and brands die because of neglect and consumer indifference (Wansink, 1997; Wansink and Huffman, 2001).

Changes in the environment resulting from consumers, competition, technology or company decisions can affect the strategic positioning of the brand from the perspective of the firm and the consumer in terms of the sources of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1998; Keller, 1999), and it is when the results of an objective audit uncovers an unhealthy brand that an organisation must entertain the hard work of determining why the brand is not working (Merz et al., 2009; Park et al., 1986), and develop actions to revitalize it. Most organizations with unhealthy brands will be able to embark on a rebranding or repositioning strategy (as opposed to a retiring), to realign their existing brand to meet their goals and customer base. If the brand remains unhealthy despite repositioning or rebranding attempts, literature points out that during this "flux", the desire to rename often surfaces and the decision to rename is generally evaluated in more earnest (Williams, 2012). The other extreme option is to retire the organization brand or close down the institution. Brands can be eliminated for various reasons that take into account the ageing process brought on by

contamination created by the environment and consumer perception as the brand is compared with other points of reference (Boyle, 2007; Jevons et al. 2007; Kapferer, 2008; Lehu, 2006). While relatively rare, this retire option does occur. Sometimes a college or university completely merges or is acquired by another institution and loses most or all of its own brand – with whatever brand equity that existed being transferred or sucked into the dominant institution.

Higher Education Institution Brand Management

Keller (1999, p.103) stresses that "brand equity must be actively managed over time by reinforcing the [healthy] brand meaning and, if necessary, by revitalizing the [unhealthy] brand." With a changing environment an organization utilizes brand management to adapt, either by reinforcing the brand or by revitalizing it via repositioning, rebranding, or renaming the corporate brand. The branding process model depicts "the decision-making process an HEI experiences beginning with a brand audit…Given an unhealthy brand audit, the HEI HEI then begins the deliberative strategic decision-making process leading to one of the other four brand flux options: retire, revitalize, refocus, or rename." (Williams & Omar, 2014, p.3). Within the branding process model, the Brand Flux Model (Williams and Omar, 2014) is applicable to most organizations, but its application in Higher Education is insightful given not only the relative lack of brand management research in higher education, but its application of the extreme option of renaming.

The seminal research by Gardner & Levy (1955) revealed that long term brand success is based upon the ability to select a brand-meaning, operationalize it in the form of an image, and constantly maintain that image over time; however this work was based on product branding, not corporate branding. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that the successful organization manages a continuous state of change (Brown & Eisenhadt, 1997; Weick & Quinn, 1999), and brand management involves a continuum of brand focus from brand-

supportive to non-brand-supportive; and from proactive to reactive, and validates the brand's relevance and distinctiveness (Abratt and Mofoking, 2000; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005).

Developing strong brands involves consistency, and brand strength needs to be actively managed since it is created by developing many social/community associations that create brand meaning, especially more recently when the internet is involved or when there is a market downturn (Aaker, 1996; Kay, 2006; Stuart & Jones, 2004). Merz et al. (2009) suggest that brand value is determined by constant interaction among all stakeholders and the firm. Creating positive brand associations leads to positive customer brand image, yet if a corporate brand takes on a negative association it cannot be leveraged until the negative associations have been changed (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 2004; Keller, 1993). Indeed, Furey et al (2014) find that branding in higher education must be managed in differing and nuanced ways. Research has focused on HEI segmentation in order to develop brand image: Bock et al, (2014) found three segments of students in the application process, while Jillapalli & Jillapalli (2014) looked at student segmentation from the point of professor brand equity; Whitfield & Idris (2014) explore the effectiveness of corporate visual identity in university settings, while Goi et al (2014) developed a scale for measuring HEI brand identity. Tobolowsky & Lowery (2014) explore the effect of TV advertising strategies, in terms of message consistency over time, and in terms of institutional positioning, respectively. The Higher Education Touchpoint Wheel Model as a method to build an HEI brand was introduced by Khana et al (2014), while Dholakia (2014) concludes that stakeholders live the brand and co-creation will generate brand value.

Most research has focused on brand management under situations with no disruptive changes in company strategy, management, or ownership (Bahadir et al., 2008), yet Blumenthal

(2002) points out a branding paradox; the difficulty in providing constancy while simultaneously changing. HEI administrators increasingly recognize the need for brand management (Chapleo, 2007; Lowrie, 2007). Yet, the relative lack of successful brand management research under changing conditions presents a gap in the literature (Boyle, 2002; Hankinson and Hankinson, 1999; Keller, 2001).

The next sections of this paper describe: the methodology used in a study that led to the development of the Brand Flux Model; the Brand Flux Model; and a case study that explains the model by depicting brand management under conditions of extreme or radical change, particularly renaming.

METHODOLOGY

Three institutions of higher education were selected and studied. All three cases were in the U.S. higher education market, more particularly the Mid-Atlantic Region. All were private institutions. Each was in the same range of student size, functional designation, and all were residential schools, and to some extent they were competitors for the same students and stakeholders. The initial qualification of possible renaming cases was conducted by using an online search of HEIs who had recently completed or were in the process of renaming. The most critical selection criteria was the fact that each institution had recently undertaken a radical renaming as opposed to a designation change (Williams and Omar, 2010). All three cases were renamed not as a result of a large donation (benefactor) nor because of a merger & acquisition, thus the decision to rename was strictly a strategic choice. This qualitative study used an approach often selected when the existing literature on a topic is sparse and when the researchers seek to build a body of knowledge based upon listening to select participants and their ideas (Cresswell, 2003). It is not focused on quantitative numbers, rather it is concerned with words (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and focuses on data gathered primarily from personal

observations, interviews and documents. This qualitative research study followed Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) approach to case study analysis by committing to multiple interpretive practices to determine how and why people acted the way they did at various stages of their institution's renaming process, and how members of independent stakeholder groups enacted their particular realities and nuances upon the HEI's respective renaming. This qualitative interpretive case study approach resulted in significant raw data, new theories and detailed models to add to the renaming body of literature. The research design was a semi-structured, qualitative, multiple-case study format that incorporated open-ended interview questions with 49 stakeholders; interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed. Secondary research from printed documents, correspondence, web sites, books, publications, reports and outside media sources supplemented the interviews. This paper focuses on one of the cases – Beaver College – which after a significant brand flux period renamed itself Arcadia University. However, limitations of content analysis include 1) code schemes are dependent on the research and view of the phenomena observed; 2) researcher inferences to the data may cause problems; 3) it is highly dependent on what is being analyzed, thus the data must be authentic, credible, and representative; 4) content analysis may not be able to answer 'why' questions; and 5) research may become labor intensive (Bryman and Bell, 2007). While there is no figure for the number of qualitative interviews to conduct before theoretical saturation occurs (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) approximately thirty (30) interviews are recommended by Thomson (2011). A total of 53 interviews were undertaken and 49 were deemed useable. The total of 49 in-depth interviews were conducted over a one year span from May, 2009 to June 2010, and varied as to duration from 45 minutes to 83 minutes, with most taking about 65 minutes. Interviews were conducted with representatives of each institution, starting with the President, and including various combinations of past president, Chairman and other Board members, administrators and staff, faculty, alumni, students, consultants / vendors, and ex-employees. With 49 semi-structured,

flexible, adaptive and specific interviews it was possible to reach thematic saturation regarding the renaming factors, which supported the phenomenological perspective that views individuals and their environment as inseparable (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

Brand Flux Model ™ and Renaming

Webster's College Dictionary (2010) defines "re" as "denoting action…done over". Most organizations with unhealthy brands embark on a revitalization, rebranding or repositioning strategy to realign their existing brand to meet their goals within their customer base. If the brand remains unhealthy despite attempts to "do over", the desire to rename often resurfaces during this 'flux' and the decision to rename is generally evaluated in more earnest. The Brand Flux Model™ combines the many identified processes often referred to as 'redefining', 'rebranding', 'realignment', 'recreating', 'revitalizing', 'restructuring', 'relaunching', 'redeployment', 'repositioning', 'revisioning', 'renaming', etc., etc. into a simple coherent descriptive five stage Brand Flux Model™. The term Brand Flux is derived from the definition of flux meaning a state of uncertainty preceding the establishment of a new direction of action. It reflects the environmental uncertainty prompting a disruption in equilibrium, followed by any activity resulting from a brand audit process incorporating the option of either reinforcement or change, and then a return to equilibrium. Brand Flux is defined as "***A state where the identity, image or reputation of an organisation is reinforced over long periods of time in equilibrium with its environment, yet with environmental challenges can adapt by altering the branding and/or positioning via revitalization, refocusing, and/or renaming***" (Williams, 2012).

The Brand Flux Model™ (figure 1 below) depicts the back and forth fluxing nature of brand management where the X axis 'Change in Branding' refers to changes in marketing aesthetics such as logo, slogan, packaging, etc. intended to create a new identity; designed to alter the

image of the brand with the consumer. The Y axis represents 'Changes in Positioning' of an organization, such as adding or subtracting market segments to target, i.e. based on variables such as demographics, income, major, or other desired variable. The model incorporates three common stages (Reinforce, Revitalize, and Refocus) as well as the substantial changes resulting in a Renaming, or in an opposite direction – Retire, based upon the degree of change from minimal to substantial.

Figure 1: Brand Flux Model
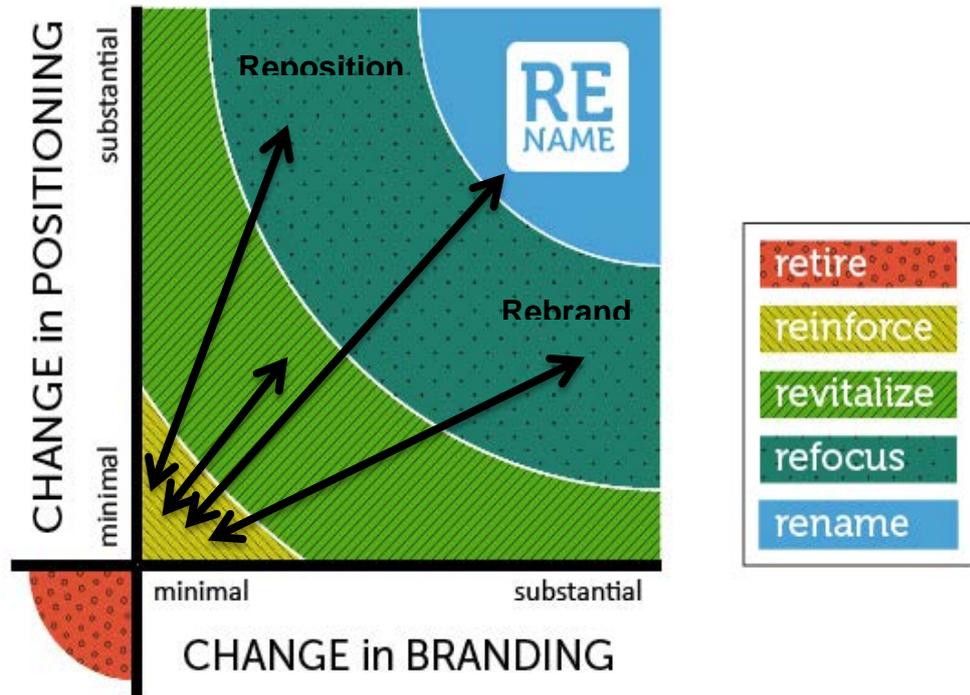
(Williams, 2012)

A company can react to a change in the environment which upsets the equilibrium by minimally changing the branding and/or positioning (Revitalize) and then return to Reinforcing activities. In this model, organizations that implement more substantial changes in branding combined with minimal changes in position will rebrand, while organizations that implement more substantial changes in position along with minimal changes in branding aesthetics will reposition. The Brand Flux Model™ clarifies rebranding and repositioning by referring to them both as "Refocusing" actions, as they are more substantial than simply

Revitalizing the brand. The Brand Flux Model™ can clarify all of the existing brand management terms mentioned earlier in relation to Changes in Branding (X axis) or Changes in Positioning (Y axis), allowing for more accurate depiction of the processes that reflect management intentions. In all cases studied, after the brand management changes (rebranding or repositioning) the organization returns to reinforcing actions to maintain brand health, as monitored by a brand audit. "This movement from Reinforce to Revitalize and back to Reinforce; from Reinforce to Refocus (by rebranding or repositioning) and then back to Reinforce, and all variations in between may occur for a long period of time, in more minor or major terms depending upon the environment pressure, organizational strategy, and management decisions. The arrows in the Brand Flux Model™ depict this reinforcing activity." (Williams & Omar, 2014, p5).

Renaming carries the greatest brand management risk (Williams, 2012). If Revitalizing or Refocusing results are inadequate due to environmental factors or a range of other reasons, a decision to Rename might be undertaken, involving the most substantial alterations in both Changes in Branding and Changes in Positioning; afterwards the organisation returns again to Reinforce the new branding and positioning.

CASE ANALYSIS: ARCADIA UNIVERSITY

Over nearly 150 years Beaver College had established an excellent reputation as a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Due to changing environmental factors, the name of the school had become a problem – not only to further growth of the school – but it indeed threatened the very existence of the college because of the impact on enrollment. In the decade or two leading up to the decision to rename, the leaders of this HEI engaged in a course of Brand Flux actions; they dropped religious affiliation, admitted males, and changed

their curriculum. Finally they made the decision to rename it Arcadia University, which they announced in 2001. Founded in 1853 as Beaver College and located in the western town of Beaver, Pennsylvania, the college moved east in 1925. Today it is an independent, comprehensive (Carnegie Master's 1) institution located in a suburb of Philadelphia, and is currently comprised of three major divisions: The College of Undergraduate Studies; the College of Graduate and Professional Studies; and the Center for Education Abroad. Beaver College operated in a niche market as a women's college until in 1973, when it began admitting men and added programs in broader areas such as physicians' assistants and physical therapists, to complement the more traditional liberal arts options. At that same time the Charter was amended to sever legal ties with the United Presbyterian Church. Their stated reasoning for this was Federal student financial aid requirements (Cameron et al., 2003). But by 1985 the President defined one major area of school deficiency as "chronic financial instability/over-reliance on tuition model" (Cameron et al., 2003, pp.128), since by then the institution "had failed to make bonded debt payments for 8 years, and the federal government threatened to bar it from the Pell grant program, which would likely shut down the college…In addition, it faced a $1.5 million budget shortfall – on an entire operating budget of $12 million at the time" (O'Neill, 2003, p2). Yet in the Fall of 2000 before the university underwent a name change enrollments numbered 1,971 FTE (full time equivalent) students, including 1,396 undergraduates and 575 graduate students. As enrollments had increased by 50 percent during the 1990's decade, entrance requirements were strengthened; successful capital campaigns and building projects resulted in the construction of seven new structures on the campus; and the number of faculty, programs, and degrees offered—and the size of the endowment—had all increased sharply. By 2000 enrollment was up and increasing; budgets were balanced for nearly a decade; the endowment and alumni giving was strong, and the academic and international reputation was high. However, with the increase in internet usage to conduct college searches the name was becoming increasingly

problematic. Unlike in 1985, the college was financially stable with solid leadership and could seriously consider its name.

Renaming Motivation Drivers and Early Decision Factors

Motivation Drivers come into play when the suggestion to rename begins to surface, or more accurately resurfaces for the last time, as was the case for Arcadia University. Williams (2012) suggests that change is necessary when two key dimensions are resolved – Motivation Drivers, and Early Decision Factors. This case demonstrated that an over-riding motivation to rename exists when an organization's current name prohibits successful rebranding or repositioning to satisfy the strategic goals having to do with growth, prestige or stability. Through examination of the college's history it was apparent that key motivational drivers existed and their leadership structure and strategic goals contributed to their eventual decision to rename.

This University utilizes a tuition-driven business model. A tuition-driven model means that while the external environment remains positive, the HEI can (all things relative and normal) continue to fill the school and meet all obligations. The HEI is more sensitive to enrollment as a revenue-generating factor and designs strategies and tactics to address any threats. When there are environmental threats, the strategic plan is key to addressing and dealing with them. As such, when market demand decreases, along with painful spending cuts, tuition-driven HEIs attempt to expand marketing efforts in order to better compete for a slice of a shrinking market, i.e. beat the competition, or move up market and raise academic quality/prices. Arcadia University's need to stabilize finances required serious discussions around methods to increase market share.

Motivation Drivers such as the need for financial stability, enrollment growth, or increased prestige (academic quality) cause HEIs to first look to repositioning or rebranding activities (Williams, 2012). Rebranding in the case of Arcadia University involved refreshed web sites and viewbooks, open houses, updated facilities (new dorms and athletic facilities), and other tactics to address an unhealthy brand. Often these tactics do solve or appear to solve the problem in the short term. Repositioning efforts included new majors and programs, a break from a heavy religious affiliation, and becoming coed. After these rebranding and repositioning actions Beaver College reinforced their decisions, and the brand appeared to stabilize. These rebranding/repositioning/reinforce cycles occurred in the late 1980's, the early 1990's, and the late 1990's. Additionally, revitalize activities were implemented from time to time involving less substantial changes. Eventually when revitalizing, rebranding or repositioning activities were no longer able to meet the strategic goals set by Arcadia University, as impacted by the environment, a renaming was again considered. Leadership was determined to increase enrollment and expressed a desire to attract male students, male athletes, and a larger more geographically diverse student body. The University was also aware that state funding accompanied each student. Their fiscal situation demanded a strategy for overall growth, and they were concerned that a big hindrance to their growth plan was their then name, Beaver College that conjured up scatological images that were further promulgated by web pop-ups.

The college had used strong word-of-mouth (WOM) and reputation in their local markets as a primary marketing strategy, and was comparatively weak at more formal brand management activities. Their informal tactics sufficed as long as the local market continued to grow, in part due to the effect of baby boomers and echo-boomers. As was the case over the last few decades in HEI in the U.S., a rising tide lifts all boats. However, when the local market hit a plateau and then began to shrink, Beaver College made a decision to expand enrollment

activities geographically. One trap of a strong local reputation and word-of-mouth is that it minimizes the need for marketing communications, yet once the market changes and the organisation must geographically expand, the internal structure and expertise to easily conduct effective marketing may be lacking. Since their name would become the first impression for anyone outside of the local market, they needed an effective brand management plan that expanded their communication range past WOM.

> *"It was a clear sense that the closer they were to the institution, [the name] wasn't a problem. But as soon as we got beyond 50, 60 miles it was definitely a problem in appealing to students as being an institution that had pretty high quality"(Williams, 2012, p.310 R5).*

> *"The strong word of mouth in the Philadelphia area could overcome any naming issues but as you grow the circle wider, the word of mouth is less valuable" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R4).*

Sometimes an excuse for weaker brand management is to blame it all on the name, believing that the name itself is the hindrance. This same brand management effort can lull an HEI into the conclusion that if they only remove the impediment [poor name] all will be well. The literature cited major reasons for organization renaming to include misperceptions, barriers, negative associations, or in some way the old name is too difficult an obstacle to overcome with just marketing (Dowling, 1995; Kilic and Dursun, 2006; Robinson and Wu, 2008). However in Arcadia University's situation the evidence was overwhelming that the name was not only a hindrance but was creating severe barriers. Over the years the name "beaver" had taken on a scatological meaning, but the college's strong local reputation and word-of-mouth meant students still enrolled. But by the late 1990's as the internet became the tool of choice

for High School students to research college choices, high school software blocked the name of Beaver College due to its linkage to pornography sites.

> *"People would get all these pop ups of pornographic material on their computers. That was back when pop up blockers were not working like they do today...It just propagated itself on your hard drive. So that connotation and people bringing that up, that they were appalled when they went to our web site...We were starting to be associated with bad things for no reason. For that reason it helped with the case [to rename], and particularly with some of the people that were against it" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R5).*

Arcadia University acknowledged the demographic fact that the echo-boom phenomenon of the 1990s would peak by roughly 2007/2008, and then the number of U.S. high school graduates was going to decline for the next 6-8 years, only getting back to par by 2015. Many HEIs including Arcadia University had been through previous painful dips in potential enrollees. Overall, many comments from Arcadia University respondents referred to this looming decrease in demand and resulting increase in competition.

> *"In the Northeast particularly, the drop off [of high school students] was going to be for a 10 to 12 year period of time. It was gonna drop a little bit each year for 10 or 12 years"(Williams, 2012, p.310 R5.)*

Another important motivation related to enrollment had to do with a desire to raise the academic level of incoming freshmen. Notwithstanding the fact that Arcadia University had a Mission to serve the underserved, one effect of increased student standards is that often the higher GPA/Test scores are correlated to family income and ability to pay tuition list price. If the family income is increased the pressure to offer student financial aid decreases (discount rate); i.e. the "smarter" the applicant, the "more profitable" it is for the HEI. So HEIs based

on the tuition driven model find it financially advantageous to raise incoming academic levels. Arcadia University indicated this motivation was a factor.

> *"We are confident that the [name] change will make it easier to recruit high-quality students"* (The Herald, Winter, 2000, p. 14).

While this declining market share or desire for academic prestige was not, over the years, reason enough to change the name at Arcadia University, it did promote renaming discussions and resulted in dropping religious affiliation, admitting males, etc. Possibly a more imminent and aggravating factor considered during the debate whether to rename was their declining yield. Yield is defined as the percentage of admitted students who actually enroll in a college. If advertising efforts do not generate enough applicants, and/or those applicants do not get converted into enrollment, the yield, or conversion ratio, declines. This yield decline puts pressure on the system. The traditional solution is to either increase applicants, or increase yield conversion. By 1999 Arcadia University had a severe yield problem.

> *"We were told by the College Board, which studies these kinds of things that, at that time, for a college of our degree of selectivity and reputation to get, to yield, the approximate 400 students that we had been shooting for in the freshman class, we should have had something like 12,000 inquiries that would boil down to something like 3,000 applications that would boil down to, I don't know how many accepts, and then 400 students showing up. But instead of 12,000 we needed 40,000 to obtain the same results, which is to say three times the number of inquiries. As best as we could tell that didn't have anything to do with our reputation, our quality, our vocation, our facilities, our offerings, or anything other than the name (Williams, 2012, p.310, R3).*

The 1974 decision to admit men to a long-time female school had left some alumnae and female alumnae board members angered; but to a great extent this "solution" or adaptation set the stage for the present renaming situation. An HEI can live with low yield if other strategic factors enable the organization to maintain its strategic plan and meet objectives. They just have to work harder. If this inefficient "working harder" mentality continues for years or decades it can create a powerful motivation for change, both logically and emotionally. Although Arcadia University was motivated to change their name from Beaver College, they still had concerns whether the timing would be right, and would all stakeholders, alumni and students especially, be on board as they proceeded.

The final decision to rename is shaped and eventually determined by risk and timing factors having to do predominantly with the Early Decision Factors of finance and leadership.

> *"I wish I could have convinced them a little bit earlier than when we actually did do it. Everything had to align correctly. We had to have the finances, we had to have the backing. The internet played a big part in it. The internet wasn't as big prior to that. On my agenda, from 1992 on, I felt that that was the one thing that would prevent Beaver College from really having the respect it deserved" (Williams 2012, p.310 R5).*

Even if the motivations to rename as part of the Brand Flux process appear to be strong, a brand flux cycle of rebranding/repositioning/reinforcing followed by more discussions about renaming can continue for quite awhile, thus delaying forward momentum for the renaming. Motivation Drivers address the issue 'Does the HEI want to change the name?', while Early Decision Factors address 'Is the HEI currently in a position to change the name?' Timing considerations around Finances and Leadership, as well as their interrelated and often co-dependent nature, affected Beaver College's decision to rename. Over time their

rebranding/reinforce, reposition/reinforce cycling continued until finally all or enough decision factors aligned so that the decision to rename became paramount. This flexing is depicted by the arrows in the refocusing and revitalizing arcs of the Brand Flux™ Model. To summarize, this case analysis uncovered a range of issues around stability, growth and prestige that led to various actions of brand flux, and exposed the problems/hindrance with the name itself, which not only motivated the Institution's discussion to rename, but eventually led to the decision to do it.

Continuous Strategic Realignment and Brand Equity

After a brand management decision is made to Revitalize, Refocus (rebrand/reposition), or Rename it is critical that the organization Reinforce the change and support the brand. Constant conscious realignment of strategic goals to all phases of the renaming is essential. This support involves a continuous strategic realignment and brand audit process to maintain brand relevance. Arcadia University continued this strategic realignment by budgeting for strategic advertising for a total of four years after the naming event:

> *"Part of the things of course we did afterwards is that I went on a major jaunt for two years. I think we went to 28 different locations...It was for three things. One, we were working on the new [strategic] plan, so that this was a chance to say here's where [Arcadia University] is going, and who we are. It was also part of the fund raising and that's how we could get some money to do all of this...Then of course it gave me a chance to put my toe in the water after the name change; help anybody who was still...because people who come to these alumni events are people who care. So I could kinda allay those people who were concerned about it, give arguments to people who thought we should do it but did not know how to explain it. And so we had a kinda three fold purpose to do this" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R8).*

> *"We decided it was a [multi-year] process to market this and keep the energy going so that the [new] name really got imbedded" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R8).*

Additionally, Arcadia University promoted the history and benefit derived from the renaming for over ten years post-renaming.

> *"You have to work on the current brand of associating the brand with the new entity and make sure you are hitting that over and over again and getting the name out there so that people come to recognize it." (Williams, 2012, p.320 R8).*

Arcadia University incorporated the 150 year heritage story of Beaver College, and the transition process to Arcadia University, to reinforce the position and brand of the university after the renaming:

> *"We have been, over the past couple years, doing some ads that we've had in the Chronicle of Higher Education about the transformation that has taken place here and we couched this in the terms of the name change…it is alluded to that this is the change that has happened at Arcadia University during that period of time and it does two things. It gives us both name recognition and it helps people see the tremendous change that has occurred and the tremendous movement that we are affecting, some of it due to the name change, most of it not" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R1).*

Even when conscious efforts are made to transfer equity, a radical renaming inevitably results in loss of equity and the strategic realignment becomes even more crucial in the clear and consistent establishment of the new brand. Arcadia University acknowledges there has been some loss of brand equity due to the renaming:

> *"There has been some loss with respect to name recognition locally. We've been working very hard though to have more media presentation, more media focus, to get the [Arcadia University] name out there and the recognition out there;[to] connect it back to Beaver College." (Williams, 2012, p.310 R1).*

"We had a really good reputation locally with the local schools. We have a very large, significant education program and it was a positive reputation locally and I think we've had to rebuild that under another name" (Williams, 2012, p.310 R4).

It is not this paper's intent to analyze and evaluate the actual renaming process used at Arcadia University, although it should be noted that it was planned, organized and implemented in a highly effective manner. Arcadia University's detailed rollout was so complete and constantly on message for many years post name-change that although they did not specifically discuss formal realignment strategies, they are commended for the level of detailed planning, careful stakeholder involvement and precise internal and external rollout activities that resulted in excellent short-term and long-term results by many measures.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

HEIs are becoming more marketized and promotionalized, and brand building is becoming a strategic goal, yet clear branding models are lacking. In the case presented the institution spent over 30 years in brand flux, in an effort to meet the strategic goals of the organization. Over the years prior to Arcadia's renaming they had instituted a series of rebranding or repositioning activities in order to deal with various outside pressures such as declining enrollment, admitting opposite genders, or breaking from religious organizations. Sometimes the brand management actions solved their immediate problems, other times the market growth muted the severity of the problems. After the rebranding, repositioning, or revitalization efforts the organization returned to reinforcing actions to maintain brand health. However, the board of trustees, executive administration and various stakeholders at Beaver/Arcadia continued to raise the issue of a radical renaming to deal with the issues. Ultimately when refocusing actions were unsuccessful a decision to rename was undertaken, after which the organization returned again to reinforce the new brand and position.

This study acknowledged the role of brand management at an HEI in order to deal with environmental events, and concluded that if brand management within an HEI service organization is ongoing, and the brand identity that the institution believes that it is promoting and projecting is indeed consistent with the brand image held by the stakeholders, renaming should not be necessary unless extenuating circumstances exist since renaming is costly both in tangible and intangible aspects and should not be underestimated or over-prescribed. Not only did the Arcadia case illustrate the Brand Flux Model in action, their rollout activities served to reinforce their renaming decision in a positive way, and enhanced the brand equity of the organization. As seen by Arcadia University's multiyear post rename marketing communications plan, organizations that understand the importance of branding and brand management to the marketization of their HEI will budget more time and resources to the renaming process, which solidifies the establishment of their new brand identity. As an understudied area, this primary research contributes to the understanding of the role of branding as a growth platform for service organizations; the management of the brand flux process by reducing terminology confusion; and new research on renaming. For practitioners, this study provides a model to assist in brand management and renaming scenarios, and offers insight into channels for optimal corporate strategy. It demonstrates that making changes in branding or change in position in order to Revitalize, Refocus (rebrand and reposition) or even Rename a brand, and then Reinforce those decisions is critical to maintaining brand health.

This study also concluded that in a non-profit service industry brand flux is often tolerated longer than it would in other industries precisely because of the unique characteristics of these industries such as intangibility, perishability, source of income and operating budget, etc. The negative associations of a name are often tolerated because the inertia necessary to

align the drivers and force the decision to rename must overpower the risks inherent in radical change.

Finally, practitioners should find valuable insights regarding their own institutions by benchmarking their own brand management's efforts and correlating them with the stages and actions of the Brand Flux Model™.

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