

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF REPUTATION AS PERCEIVED BY
STUDENTS AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE

by

Lauren P. Miller

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Science in Corporate and Professional Communication

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Scott W. Dunn

May 2013

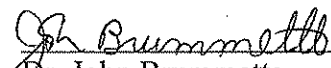
© 2013, Lauren P. Miller



Dr. Scott W. Dunn
Thesis Advisor

5/3/13

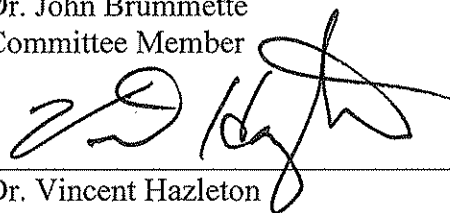
Date



Dr. John Brummette
Committee Member

5-3-13

Date



Dr. Vincent Hazleton
Committee Member

5/3/13

Date

Abstract

Having identified a lack of research conducted on the variables of reputation within the university context, the purpose of this study is to identify the elements that make up a university's reputation as perceived by its current students. This study used a mixed-methods approach to explore this relatively understudied area. The first phase used three focus groups with current students at a small public institution to identify the foundational variables that make up the reputation of their university. The participants of the qualitative phase identified five major elements that make up their university's reputation. The participants viewed external perceptions, a sense of unity, visible outcomes, comparison to other institutions, and the health and safety of the institution as influential factors on the university's reputation. The second phase of the study used a pilot survey to obtain data from students to identify the possible relationships between the variables identified in the focus groups. The data obtained from phase two of this study revealed that a sense of unity, first-hand experience, positive representatives of the university, external perceptions, behavioral restrictions, strong relationships, and safety to be significant factors in the university's reputation. From the integration of these studies, it appears that external perceptions, a sense of unity among the university's members, visible outcomes, and the health and safety behavioral restrictions are the largest influencing factors to the university's overall reputation.

Lauren P. Miller, M.S.
School of Communication, 2013
Radford University

Dedication

To Dr. Dunn: I will never be able to extend enough thanks to show my appreciation for the time sacrifice you made to oversee this research project from start to finish. This project would not have been a success without your valuable input and advice. It was truly an honor to have you serve as my chair for this project. Thank you for your patience and for having faith in me!

To Dr. Brummette: Your guidance and mentorship from day one of this project are something I can never repay you for. The confidence you had in me encouraged me to go above and beyond, and you really helped to push me to be the best I could be. The project would have never even begun if it weren't for you.

To Dr. Hazleton: I am honored and excited to have had you serve on my committee. Your expertise and experience with reputation guided my research, and you were a vital and invaluable resource. I am so thankful to have been able to work with you, and I am grateful for your encouragement from the start.

I would also like to thank my mom, dad, and brother for emotionally supporting me during this journey. I would not have made it to where I am today without your support.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables and Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Literature Review	3
Definition	3
Dimensions	6
Reputation in Public Relations	7
Reputational Outcomes	12
Investigating Reputation in a Educational Service-Oriented Firm	16
Organizational Trust	18
Chapter 3. Qualitative Phase Methodology	25
Participants	26
Procedures	28
Focus Group Data Analysis	32
Chapter 4. Qualitative Phase Findings	34
Chapter 5. Quantitative Phase Methodology	54
Participants	54
Procedures	54

Survey Data Analysis	55
Chapter 6. Quantitative Phase Findings	57
Chapter 7. Discussion	66
References	81

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1 – Definitions of Reputations	5
Table 2 – Focus Group Guiding Questions	30
Table 3 – List of Original Survey Items	58
Table 4 – Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation of Student Opinion Items ..	62
Table 5 – Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation of Reputation Influences ..	63

Figures

Figure 1	20
----------------	----

Chapter 1- Introduction

The concept of reputation has existed as early as the time of Socrates around 400 BC, and its dimensions have continually expanded into the realm of the educational sector (Times Higher Education, 2012). With thousands of colleges and universities operating in the United States alone, the leaders of each institution must determine specific ways to differentiate their university to make it more attractive to potential students and maintain its credibility. This is imperative considering all universities within the educational industry are looking to fulfill their overriding missions of delivering high quality educational services to their students. One factor authorities may choose to focus on in their attempt to differentiate their university is the institution's reputation.

Rising tuition rates have placed an emphasis on reputation as college tuition rates have increased drastically compared to tuition rates in 1985, especially in comparison to the increases in medical care costs, gasoline, and all consumer items (Rampell, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported that the average tuition rate for the 1980-1981 academic year of a 4-year public institution was \$8,756 in comparison with the 2010-2011 academic year, which was \$15,605, even with these rates accounting for inflation. This is a critical consideration in the educational sector because the *customers* cannot necessarily try the *product*, or educational services, offered before making a financial commitment. This results in a heavy reliance on the organization's reputation to help the potential student make a final decision about which university he or she should attend.

The decision to attend a university requires not only financial commitments, but also emotional commitments on behalf of the student as well as the student's family members. Students must determine which school best fits their academic, personal, and social needs. A

reputation can either help the initial interest that is sparked by a student if that reputation aligns with the student's academic needs, personal interests and social needs, or a reputation may hinder that initial interest if it does not align. A student will probably be more likely to make the emotional commitment to attend a university in which the reputation fits with what he or she is seeking to help alleviate the discomfort of transferring to a new environment.

How does a university know how to better connect with potential students, or even with its current students, to improve how it is viewed and valued through its reputation without knowing the specific components that make up this reputation? This study will look to identify what variables students at a small public institution perceive to be influential in the university's overall reputation.

The significance of reputation in the context of higher education is evident due to its ability to help a university differentiate itself from competing universities, its power to impact the perception of financial and emotional commitments on behalf of the students, and how students perceive its influence on their future professional careers. It is a common assumption that students invest their time and money in a college degree to enter into a professional career. With many students hoping to find careers following graduation, they expect their universities to prepare and qualify them for these positions.

The following chapter will further analyze previous research that has been conducted on the concepts of reputation and trust and discuss how those concepts are interlinked with one another as well as how they fit within the different contexts of business, higher education and public relations.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

Organizational Reputation

Definitions

There has been a dramatic increase in studies being conducted by management researchers on the concept of reputation over the past decade. This increase can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the release of *Fortune Magazine's* list of "America's Most Admired Companies" (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). While this "formative phase" of organizational reputation research has led to major developments in the management field, it has also created confusion by introducing multiple definitions, conceptualizations, and the development of different approaches (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011, p. 153).

It is first important to outline the key elements that make up the concept of reputation. Chun (2005) defined corporate reputation as the overarching theme in which corporate image and corporate identity fall under. Corporate image refers to the perception that outsiders hold of an organization, while corporate identity refers to the perception that insiders hold of an organization. Furthermore, corporate reputation covers the perception of both internal and external stakeholders as well as the interaction that takes place between these stakeholders (Chun, 2005). This study will focus on the overall term of corporate reputation to cover the broad array of stakeholders involved with a university. These stakeholders may include current students, potential students, parents, friends, family members, college advisors, and high school advisors.

After reviewing several studies conducted on reputation, Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) defined corporate reputation as the "observers' collective judgments of a corporation based on the assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the

corporation overtime” (p. 34). They argued that studying the combination of all these definitions provided a primary vision for the concept of corporate reputation and shifted the focus of its examination from a phase of awareness to a phase of evaluation.

Similarly, Lange, Lee, and Dai (2011) analyzed various definitions of organizational reputation and found that they fit in three themes that include being known, being known for something, and generalized favorability. They argued that the theme of being known is the “generalized awareness or visibility of the firm” or “the prominence of the firm in the collective perception,” being known for something is “the perceived predictability of organizational outcomes and behavior relevant to specific audience interests,” and generalized favorability is “the perceptions or judgments of the overall organization as good, attractive, and appropriate” (p. 155). The authors argued that it is important for researchers to view corporate reputation as a multidimensional construct with various antecedents and consequences for an organization.

Rather than looking at the dimensions of reputation for a definition, Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever (2000) analyzed definitions from various academic disciplines. These definitions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Definitions of Reputations

Discipline	Definition
Economics	Reputations are traits or signals that describe a company's probable behavior in a particular situation.
Strategy	Reputations are intangible assets that are difficult for rivals to imitate, acquire, or substitute, and so create mobility barriers that provide their owners with a sustained competitive advantage.
Accounting	Reputation is one of many types of intangible assets that are difficult to measure but create value for companies.
Marketing	Reputation describes the corporate association that individuals establish with the company name.
Communications	Reputations are corporate traits that develop from relationships companies establish with their multiple constituents.
Organization theory	Reputations are cognitive representations of companies that develop as stakeholders make sense of corporate activities
Sociology	Reputational ranking are social constructions emanating from the relationship firms establish with stakeholders in their shared institutional environment.

Source: Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever (2000)

The lack of a definition specific to the reputation of an academic university has led the researcher to pose the following research question in an attempt to set a foundation for the identification of the factors that students believe make up their university's reputation:

RQ1: How do current students evaluate the reputation of their university?

Dimensions

Other researchers have attempted to define organizational reputation in terms of dimensions. For example, Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, and Sever (2005) proposed that organizational reputation consists of two dimensions: perceived quality and prominence. The perceived quality dimension looks at "how stakeholders evaluate a particular organizational attribute," and is often observed through an economics perspective while the prominence dimension is comprised of the "collective awareness and recognition" that an organization has built up over time, and it is often observed through the institutional perspective (Rindova et al., 2005, p. 1034).

Walsh and Beatty (2007) identified five content dimensions that make up a customer-based view of corporate reputation in a service context, which is a similar context to that of an educational institution. These researchers developed a customer-based reputation (CBR) scale with dimensions that include customer orientation, good employer, a reliable and financially strong company, product and service quality, and social and environmental responsibility.

The customer orientation dimension is concerned with factors that include the manner in which the organization treats its customers; the dimension of being a good employer analyzes if the company looks like it is good to work for and how much the organization pays attention to its employees; the dimension of being reliable and financially strong looks at future growth and the

tendency to outperform competitors; the product and service quality dimension looks at the value and stance behind a company's products, and the social and environmental responsibility dimension looks to see if the organization is making an effort to create new jobs and appears to support good causes.

The five reputation dimensions identified by Walsh and Beatty (2007) are directly applicable to the university context and will help to lay a foundation for identifying which dimensions are perceived to be the most important in such a context. With all of the previously proposed definitions, further research needs to be conducted to determine if these existing definitions and dimensions are valid or suitable within a university context. The researcher is asking the following research question to determine the factors that current students perceive to make up their university's reputation:

RQ2: What factors do students identify as influencing their university's reputation?

Reputation in Public Relations

The drastic increase in the study of reputation and reputation management in the business context has led to significant new developments, however, researchers have failed to identify a common definition and theoretical foundation. Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, and Genest (2001) claimed that the introduction of reputation management has created an identity crisis for public relations as the field itself has also failed to reach a common definition. In addition to its impact on public relations, the lack of theory development for corporate reputation has also inhibited researchers' ability to effectively analyze reputation in a statistical way (Wartick, 2002).

A common theme or function of public relations is reputation management. Hutton and his colleagues (2001) noted that "*reputation* is a concept far more relevant to people who have

no direct ties to an organization, whereas *relationships* are far more relevant to people who are direct stakeholders of the organization (employees, customers, stockholders and others, who usually are the organization's most important publics)" (p. 258). His argument demonstrates the importance of examining reputation in the university setting because most students lack a direct tie with the institution prior to making the financial and academic commitment to attend.

A fundamental role of a public relations practitioner is to build and maintain positive relationships with an organization's internal and external publics. Yang (2007) found that positive organization-public relational outcomes have a significant positive relationship with a favorable reputation and that an organization can develop a favorable reputation by engaging in quality relationship management with its publics. It is important to note that reputations can have negative implications for organizations when they are unfavorable (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011).

Grunig and Hon (1999) suggested that "in the context of the public-organization relationship, the value of a trustworthy reputation is so great that it becomes rational not to try to seize any short-term advantage" (p. 19). Their argument implies that reputation is directly related to the variable of trust. Using the research that has linked reputation and public relations, the researcher posed the following research question in regards to reputation in the university context:

RQ3: Which public relations tactics do students perceive to be the most beneficial to increase their university's reputation?

Another facet of public relations is crisis communication, which is vital for educational organizations to keep at the forefront of their communication plans with the recent increase in school violence occurring across the nation. The vitality of a reputation, often built through an

organization's public relations activities, is demonstrated during a time of crisis. Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) identifies the appropriate crisis response strategies that should be used with certain crisis types, all of which are intended to protect an organization's reputational assets. His theory also demonstrates the importance for organizations to build and maintain their reputational capital through the use of public relations strategies (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis communication response strategies are typically delivered through mass media outlets in attempts to reach as many members of the target audience as quickly and accurately as possible. Using mass media outlets also helps ensure that information is readily available in a convenient manner for those who are searching for information about the crisis situation. While the media reputation of an organization is extremely significant during a time of crisis, the media reputation of an organization during times of non-crisis is critical as well. It is a time when it is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

Deephouse (2000) defined media reputation as "the overall evaluation of a firm presented in the media" (p. 1091). Viewers of the information the media presents in its stories could have more of an impact on stakeholders because they may see information coming through a gatekeeper as more credible. On the other hand, the information could have less of an impact because the stakeholders may see the media as biased and only presenting one side of the story. Regardless, an organization, such as a university, must pay special attention to what is being presented in the media in their public relations efforts.

Moreover, when it comes to media reputation, an organization cannot just focus on its public relations and the messages it is disseminating, but it must ensure that it is following

through with action by all of its members (Caudron, 1997). This may prove to be an especially daunting task for a university made up of thousands of student members who serve as representatives for the organization, but who do not experience direct repercussions for speaking negatively of their university, yet they do risk devaluing the respect held for their degree. On the other hand, corporate organizations have more control over the majority of its members because most of its representative members are employees who risk discontinuation of employment if their actions do not align with what the organization asks for.

In looking at strategic reputation management for the more specific mass media outlet of social networking sites, “what is important is that social media content cannot be controlled in advance and that content cannot be managed in the same way as, for example, conventional media such as TV or newspapers. In practice, this means that it is almost impossible for organizations to control conversations about themselves” (Aula, 2010, p. 44). This increases the need for organizations to engage in environmental scanning during their public relations efforts.

With sixty-seven percent of Internet users using social media networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, it is important for organizations to focus on the users of these sites during their analysis and maintenance of their organizational reputation (Brenner, 2013). Furthermore, it is important to note that eighty-three percent of the users of social media networking sites fall in the age range of 18-29 (Brenner, 2013). Since most traditional college students fall in this category, universities should pay special attention to what is being said about their university in the evaluation and protection of their media reputation. This environmental scanning should especially be kept at the forefront since “social media expands the spectrum of reputation risks and boosts risk dynamics” (Aula, 2010, p. 44). In order

to monitor these social media sites for reputation management, it would be helpful for a university to know exactly how its students perceive social media outlets and their view of its influence on the university's reputation. This leads to the following research question:

RQ4: How do students view the influence of how their university is portrayed in the media (including social media) on the university's overall reputation?

Reputational Outcomes

In regards to reputation, Marken (1990) commented, “In nutritional circles, it’s said that you are what you eat. As a corporate entity, you are what people think you are” (p. 21). Over the past decade, organizations have placed a stronger emphasis on their reputations to create barriers to market entry, increase customer retention rates, and strengthen their competitive advantage (Schwaiger, 2004). A university may look to create market entry barriers to discourage other universities from developing enough to increase the likelihood of students attending that new university. For universities, they have looked to increase positive perceptions of their educational institutions and decrease the negative perceptions in an attempt to increase or retain the numbers of customers, or students, they have enrolling in their services. Just like any other corporate entity, a university cannot remain in existence without retaining their current students and gaining more incoming students every year.

According to Lange, Lee, and Dai (2011), several researchers have investigated the economic consequences of reputation. Furthermore, reputation can be viewed as an index of the worth or value of an organization and is likely to be related to its performance and investment in promotion, size, growth, and history (Bromley, 2000). Reputation in an educational context may serve as a reflection of the quality of education students receive. With the recent budget crisis, this idea of reputation and profitability can be directly applicable within the educational context. This is especially true as universities have responded to the economic situation with a marketing strategy by viewing and treating students as consumers in an attempt to remain competitive in a suffering industry (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Money and Hillenbrand (2006) proposed a framework where reputation is centered on the creation of value for the organization through its antecedents and consequences. The antecedents in their model are the observations or experiences a public has with the organization while the consequences are seen as the public's intentions or behaviors after those observations. Their model also demonstrates the impact of reputation on value creation. For example, if a customer had a bad experience with an organization, the model proposes this would lead to negative beliefs or attitudes.

These beliefs or attitudes would ultimately create unfavorable intentions or behaviors, which may occur through negative comments or making the decision to discontinue future interactions with the company. Therefore, reputation is critical for an organization to create value for itself and to remain in existence. Again, this is critical for a university since it is the type of organization that requires a large influx of new consumers each year after losing an entire generation of consumers each year following graduation.

Cravens, Oliver, and Ramamoorti (2003) proposed that new measurements of corporate reputation should be used in conjunction with other financial materials such as the company's annual report and stock prices. If management in an organization with a favorable reputation makes the decision to supplement their financial materials with reputation materials, then they would suffer less damage in stock market penalties than an organization with an unfavorable reputation (Pfarrer, Pollock, & Rindova, 2010). This demonstrates the importance of reputation viewed in the study of business management, and also reinforces why researchers have mainly focused their research studies in the business context, which has led to the gap in the research of

reputation in the university context. Thus, this identifies the primary foundation for the need of this research study to be conducted.

Kim (2001) developed a two-stage model that measured the impact of public relations on an organization's economic bottom line. Their study found a positive relationship between public relations expenses and the organization's reputation as well as a positive relationship between the company's reputation and its revenue. Findings from their study can be used to make the argument that public relations efforts have the ability to create a positive reputation for an organization. This is an important consideration during a time when a lot of organizations are undergoing budget crises.

Other researchers have concluded that a positive reputation can lead to a competitive advantage for an organization and customer loyalty (Dolphin, 2004; Schwaiger, 2004; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun et al., 2000; Hall, 1993). Saxton (1998) also found that an organization with an overall higher reputation status than its competitors led to its consumers holding a higher level of loyalty towards the company. His study demonstrates the importance of reputation on making a decision involving a long-term commitment. With the minimum collegiate degree requirement beginning at two years, Saxton's findings within the insurance industry suggest that a student attending a university with a high reputation will hold more loyalty towards that educational institution.

Standifird (2001) analyzed reputation in conjunction with e-commerce to find the impact of positive and negative ratings on eBay auctions to find that what a buyer is willing to pay for the item in an eBay auction depends on the positive or negative feedback ratings of the seller. The study of organizations in the United Kingdom by Dolphin (2004) suggested that a favorable

reputation leads to increased value and sales. A reputation can be viewed as an asset for an organization, but is often overlooked by its communication executives or “guardians of legitimacy” due to its intangibility (Dolphin, 2004, p. 78). It is common for an organization’s executives to carry a heavy focus on the tangible consequences of their business actions, primarily because the concept of return on investment is a direct measurement and can be presented as a direct outcome. This is a challenge that must be overcome when looking at the vitality of reputation because it is extremely difficult to measure and link the results of a positive or negative reputation. Unfortunately, this leads to frustration with upper management because their success depends on presenting the outcomes of their executive decisions.

Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, and Genest (2001) argued that reputation management cannot just be monitored by an organization’s communication executives; rather, it must be viewed as an outcome based on all an organization’s behaviors, which makes it difficult to engage in complete reputation management, unless it is viewed as an integral part of the organization. For example, they mentioned the importance of companies placing the reputation concept in their missions, which is often seen as a foundational element for an organization and at the forefront of their cultures. In other words, effective reputation management results from an organization and all of its members knowing the sole purpose of their organization. It is also important for members to be willing to stand behind a clear and cohesive message on behalf of the organization, and they are promoting the same beliefs, values, and attitudes as outlined in the organization’s mission statement.

It is important to mention that a favorable reputation does not, by itself, ultimately lead to value and success for a company. Page and Fearn (2005) stated that while a “*bad* reputation does

make building brand equity difficult... a *good* reputation does not guarantee strong brands” (p. 308). Therefore, an organization’s reputation only serves as the foundation for building a strong brand. Without a strong reputation, actions cannot be taken to further develop a successful name. A successful and respected university must first concentrate on its reputation before focusing on other action plans.

Investigating Reputation in a Educational Service-Oriented Firm

Similar to online business transactions in which the customer is not presented with an opportunity to try the product or service before making a monetary commitment, the consumers of educational services are not able to attend classes at a university prior to actually paying tuition and enrolling as an official student (Josang, Ismail, & Boyd, 2007). As a result, the consumer must rely more heavily on reputation and the trust they have for an organization to make an appropriate decision. With a college’s reputation and stature being considered its most valuable assets, it is important to view academic reputations from a systems perspective (Theus, 1993).

Communication is imperative to the organizational life-cycle and since colleges and universities are resource-acquiring institutions, they rely heavily on a positive reputation to attract the students, faculty members, and financial resources they need to remain stable (Theus, 1993). Reputation plays such a critical role in the service sector that it is not only needed to attract the resources as mentioned by Theus (1993), but it is necessary in order to retain those resources through the delivery of quality services (Fombrun, 1996). Universities are not only looking to attract incoming freshman, but they must also look to maintain or increase their student retention rates to remain in existence. The identification of reputation variables for the

university's reputation will provide a huge benefit for research purposes as well as for the organization, because it will serve as a guide for administrators on what aspects they should concentrate more heavily on in attracting and retaining students.

In November 1988, *Business Week* published its first ranking of business schools in the United States based on data obtained from former students and recruiters (Fombrun, 1996). This was the first time educational institutions were ranked based on the perceptions of their clients, or reputation, rather than just on the biased information from each school's dean. This led many schools to turn to public relations. This type of ranking system allowed the public to have further insight into an organization to make an initial decision to either interact or not interact with an organization, or it could also help current customers to either continue or end their relationship with the organization.

Other than using ranking systems like the one published by *Business Week*, researchers have found that potential students perceive a university's reputation through its ability to lead its students into a successful postgraduate career (Conard & Conard, 2000), financial reasons (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001), quality of education, and the evaluations or performance of the university's athletic programs (Yang et al., 2008). Sung and Yang (2008) found that trust leads to stability for social institutions and university reputation does have an effect on the supportive attitudes of the students. They also concluded that a university's external prestige is a better predictive variable over the university's personality and reputation. In other words, students hold more value towards the perceptions that others hold of an institution rather than their own perceptions.

This is especially important considering the influence outsiders serve in the decision making process of a potential student. Several models have been developed to determine how a student moves through the decision process of which college he or she will attend. This research on university reputation focused on the preliminary student-choice model developed by Vrontis, Thrassou, and Melanthiou (2007). This model focuses on the decision process for a student in contemporary higher education in developed countries, and it was based on another model developed by Hanson and Litten. Vrontis, Thrassou, and Melanthiou's (2007) model demonstrated that outsiders heavily influence the information gathering and sending application phases of the decision process and not so much during the first two phases of college aspirations and the search process. This is an indicator of when the influence of university's reputation as perceived by outsiders is critical.

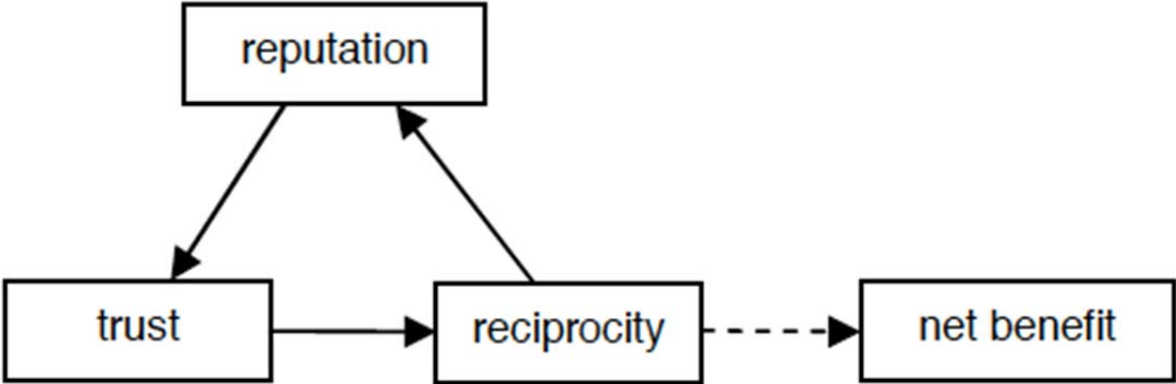
Organizational Trust

While there is a substantial amount of research focusing exclusively on either the reputation variable or the trust variable, only a limited amount of studies have looked at the relationship between the variables of reputation and trust. These few studies have mostly analyzed the combination of reputation and trust through the business context in computer-mediated communication and the e-business transactions of sites such as eBay and Amazon (Josang, Ismail, & Boyd, 2007; Mui, Mohtashemi, & Halberstadt, 2002). For example, eBay users are able to rate the quality of the eBay seller that sold them their item once the transaction is complete. Buyers may leave a positive, negative, or neutral rating for the buyer, and the combination of these ratings is displayed in the seller's information when selling an item. The combination of these ratings is essentially the reputation of the seller and will impact how buyers view or purchase items from that particular seller. The findings from such online business

transactions have demonstrated the value behind reputation as research has found a positive reputation through positive ratings is more likely to lead to sales (Josang, Ismail, & Boyd, 2007). With these findings in mind within the university context, it would be interesting to see if students would use unofficial rating systems of educational organizations in a similar manner, and if they would serve as large of an influence in encouraging students to trust a university enough to enroll with that particular institution.

Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt (2002) defined trust as “a subjective expectation an agent has about another’s future behavior based on the history of their encounters.” (p. 5). In their research, which focused on reputation, trust, and reciprocity in e-Businesses, these researchers found three significant relationships that lead to the development of the computational model, shown in Figure 1 below, which indicates the relationships between the concepts of trust, reputation, and reciprocity.

Figure 1



Source: Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt (2002)

Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt (2002) claimed that trust could be inferred from the reputation of the agents. Their model proposes that an increase in favorability through reputation will lead to an increase in trust which can lead to an increase in reciprocating actions from the public on behalf of the organization, and the model goes a step further to incorporate the product of the relationship between the three variables, which is the net benefit to the organization. The direction of arrows indicates the direction of influence between the variables.

Kah and Xie (2009) found that corporate reputation is correlated with both customer trust and customer identification, with a stronger effect of an organization's reputation on the customers' perception of its trustworthiness than on their decision to identify or not identify with the company. This means that customers are more likely to see a company with a favorable reputation as trustworthy, however, it is important to note that this is usually only observed in the business context. Using Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt's (2002) model and the literature on organizational trust and reputation, this study will look to identify the possible consequences a positive or negative reputation has on the trust of students. Therefore, this study asks the following research question:

RQ5: What is the perceived impact of a university's reputation on a student's level of trust that it will fulfill its educational mission?

Other studies have been conducted that examine trust and reputation, but many have failed to keep an equal emphasis on both of the individual variables. Many studies used trust as one dimension for the measure of reputation. Davies, Chun, Vinhas da Silva, and Roper (2004) developed the Corporate Character Scale, which uses a personification metaphor as a measurement of corporate reputation from a more emotional perspective. In the Corporate

Character Scale, the construct of trust falls under the category of agreeableness, which falls under the even broader categorical dimension of integrity, and it can be used to evaluate the reputation of an organization both internally as well as externally (Davies et al., 2004).

Other researchers have viewed reputation as “a collective measure of trustworthiness (in the sense of reliability) based on the referrals or ratings from members in the community” (Josang, Ismail, & Boyd, 2007, p. 621). However, personal experience will outweigh referrals from others, unless no personal experience opportunities are presented in which trust is based on second hand referrals (Josang et al., 2007). Yang, Alessandri, and Kinsey (2008) also supported the notions that a public’s perceptions are developed through previous experience with the organization and information the public has been given about the organization through other channels of communication (i.e. the media).

Researchers have also faced the challenge of achieving consensus for a commonly accepted definition of trust. Grunig (1999) defined trust as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (p. 3). Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) added the component of expectation to their definition of trust, which they conceptualized as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712).

This is especially important for students entering a university because they do not just have to make a short-term decision on an action like that of a business transaction. A student does not have much control over a university because the decision to stop interacting with the university will have minimal impact on the organization, but it will lead to long-term

consequences for the student if the decision is made to leave the university. This decision could increase the chances for a delay in the completion of a degree, or it could hinder the student's chances of transferring credits to another university.

Trust has also been observed as a result of the level of confidence that one party holds for the other party's integrity and reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). On a more interpersonal level between two individual interactants, Dasgupta (2000) referred to trust as being the expectation one person holds about another person's actions with a decision having to be made prior to knowing the extent of latter's actions. This is especially relatable to an incoming student since most universities require a financial deposit to secure a place in the upcoming semester. Prospective students who have not attended a university before are going to have to rely on what others are saying about the institution; in other words, they are relying on its reputation to determine if they trust or believe the university will deliver on its promise to provide a quality education to prepare the student for their future.

Hon and Grunig (1999) divided the concept of trust into three dimensions: integrity (the belief that an organization is fair and just), dependability (the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do, and competence (the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do).

Although multiple definitions of trust have been presented in extant literature, the current study will use Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995)'s definition of trust, which is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability

to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). This definition was chosen because it is the most relatable to the university context.

With the conceptualization of reputation and the link between reputation and public relations identified, all of the research questions that guided this study are outlined together below:

RQ1: How do current students evaluate the reputation of their university?

RQ2: What factors do students identify as influencing their university’s reputation?

RQ3: Which public relations tactics do students perceive to be the most beneficial to increase their university’s reputation?

RQ4: How do students view the influence of how their university is portrayed in the media (including social media) on the university’s overall reputation?

RQ5: What is the perceived impact of a university’s reputation on a student’s level of trust that it will fulfill its educational mission?

Chapter 3- Qualitative Phase Methodology

The methodology used for this study looked to use the benefits of a mixed-methods research design. This study used a methodological triangulation format to sequentially combine both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This triangulation approach helped to increase the validity of the overall research findings (Mangan, Lalwani, & Gardner, 2004). Moreover, the study is broken down into two phases. The first phase used qualitative research through focus groups, while the second phase used a quantitative survey consisting of questions that were developed based on the researcher's findings from the qualitative focus groups.

The researcher began the research process with the qualitative focus groups because the concept of reputation in universities has been rarely studied in the academic realm. According to Edmunds' (1999) *Focus Group Research Handbook*, focus groups are considered the best method to use when the researcher is looking to evaluate a new concept or idea. As seen in the collection of literature, the majority of past research studies focusing on reputation and trust fall within the business context; therefore, the best method of investigation for this study in the educational context was fulfilled through focus groups. Additionally, since "the most common purpose of a focus group interview is for an in-depth exploration of a topic about which little is known," (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 102) the focus groups used in the qualitative phase of this study set the foundation for a quantitative pilot study and for future researchers to further analyze data collected through quantitative methods.

This specific method of qualitative research in the first phase of this study did not have a focus on statistical analysis and placed more of an emphasis on the exploration of the concepts of trust and reputation in the relatively new context of a higher education institution. Consequently, this allowed for a clearer understanding of the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and motivations of

the focus group participants (Edmunds, 1999). Kitzinger agreed that this research method is “particularly useful for exploring people’s knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way” (1995, p. 299). It is important to keep in mind that “the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation” (Krueger, 1994, p. 87).

In terms of organization, the methodology for the first, qualitative, phase is described and is followed by its results. Next, the methodology for the second, quantitative, phase is described and followed by its results. The organization of these two phases follows what Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) described as a sequential exploratory design type. The criteria for this type of research design suggests a collective interpretation of the two phases. Therefore, the findings of the data from both phases were integrated and collectively interpreted in the discussion section.

Focus Group Participants

Recruitment for the focus group participants was targeted at current graduate and undergraduate students at the university. The researcher made announcements in several graduate level classes and also sent a recruitment script to professors teaching undergraduate courses in chemistry, general education, communication, public speaking, and media studies at the university examined in the study. Some professors announced the focus groups in their classes, while others chose to forward the e-mail with the focus group information in it to their students. The researcher left the decision of offering extra credit up to the discretion of each professor. The researcher also posted the focus group dates and times along with a brief description of the purpose of the study on several social media outlets. Finally, flyers that were

approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were posted on bulletin boards found on campus.

Each of these recruitment tactics featured the contact information of the researcher including name, phone number, and e-mail address. Students were instructed to contact the researcher to sign up for one of the three scheduled dates. Once the students signed up for a specific date and time, the researcher delivered an electronic confirmation letter with more detailed instructions as a reminder at a closer date.

Following the recommendation from the Qualitative Research Council of the Advertising Research Foundation, this phase looked to have eight to ten participants per focus group “to take advantage of group dynamics while maintaining the control that comes with smaller groups” (as referred to in Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 246). According to Poindexter and McCombs (2000), allowing more participants would have resulted in a longer focus group, and may have caused discouragement for the participants because they may not have felt like they could voluntarily speak on all of the dominant conversation topics. The researcher looked to recruit more students than actually needed for the focus group to make up for the participants who signed up for the focus groups but did not show.

Prior to the release of the recruitment script to classes, the message's content was submitted to the IRB for review. This ensured the focus groups were conducted ethically and in compliance with research guidelines. Furthermore, even with the monetary funding and time constraints of this study, the researcher looked to encourage student participation by offering free refreshments during the focus groups.

Focus Group Procedures

Experts specializing in focus groups have found that the amount of new information found significantly decreases after the third focus group (Greenbaum, 1988). Therefore, a total of three focus groups were scheduled to allow new information to be collected in a limited time period. These three individual focus groups were scheduled for one-hour time frames and were conducted by the second week in December.

The first focus group was held on December 6, 2012 and had a total of nine participants. The second focus group was also held on December 6, 2012 and had a total of six participants. The third focus group was held on December 10, 2012 and had a total of six participants. A total of 21 individuals participated in three focus groups with 52% of the focus group participants being female and 48% being male. All of the participants were classified as traditional undergraduate and graduate students, in terms of age.

The researcher wanted to ensure the participants were able to attend the focus group in a convenient and comfortable setting; therefore, the three focus groups were conducted in a pre-approved room on the university campus. To compensate for some of the consequences that may have arisen from using a voice recording device (such as multiple participants speaking at one time, inaudible comments, etc.), the researcher followed the recommendation set forth by Kidd and Parshall (2000) and had a minimum of two researchers (the primary researcher and an accompanying faculty research partner) attend each focus group. The author served as the moderator while the other researcher took detailed notes during the session.

Once the preplanning stage was completed, the researcher focused on the specific procedure during the focus group. Prior to the date of the focus group, the researcher developed

an outline and discussion guide for the moderator as well as a consent form for each participant in accordance with IRB protocol.

Once the researcher had a minimum of six participants show up for the focus group and each student had completed the consent form, the moderator formally began the focus group by welcoming the participants and thanking them for their time. Next, the participants were provided with a brief verbal summary of the study's purpose, and they were notified of all ethical research guidelines such as confidentiality and the option to leave the group at any time.

The next stage of the focus group began with asking the participants the first of six guiding questions. The moderator guided the group's discussion until the first guiding question was exhausted, and then moved onto the next question. The guiding questions were organized by priority in the case that time did not allow for all of the guiding questions to be asked. The focus groups were capped at one hour.

The following six guiding questions were used:

Table 2

Focus Group Guiding Questions

Guiding Questions

As a student, how would you define the reputation of your university?

Would you say that the way current students or the way outsiders see the university impacts your university's reputation the most?

What type of impact do you believe media (including social media) have on the overall reputation of your university?

What specific tactics do you believe your university could take to improve its overall reputation?

What reputational benefits or consequences, if any, may result from your university being ranked in a national collegiate ranking system?

What other factors do you believe contribute to your university's reputation?

After the focus group reached an ending point, the moderator briefly summarized the overall findings from the group's discussion and ensured the participants felt they were being accurately and fairly represented in the data collected. Next, the moderator provided the researcher's contact information as well as the closing statements in accordance with the focus group script.

Once the participants were dismissed, the researchers who attended the focus group initiated a debriefing session to record any extra data and review the data collected during the focus group session. All printed data materials were collected and secured by the primary researcher and all electronic recordings were collected and secured by the primary researcher on a password protected personal computer.

Focus Group Data Analysis

Academic researchers using qualitative research methods feel that the analysis and interpretation processes of the data collected from certain qualitative methods, such as focus groups, can be considered just as rigorous of a research method as any other (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). With this in mind, it was imperative for the researcher to choose the most appropriate method for the most effective data analysis. The specific method of data analysis the researcher chose was based upon the research questions as well as the primary purpose of the research study (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Since this phase was looking to identify reputational and trust factors within the fairly new context of the university, the researcher chose to use a transcript-based data analysis method.

In looking at the units of analysis for this study, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) noted the increase of difficulty that develops for complete unitization with conducting multiple focus groups on the same topic. For this study, the researcher chose to use open-coding to sample the overall group discussion through thematic units rather than having specific units of analysis. As a result, the researcher followed an inductive grounded theory approach first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach proposes that “generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (p. 6). The process of developing a theory from data fits perfectly in this research phase since the idea of reputation and trust has only been studied in the relatively understudied context area of a higher education institution.

While the researcher engaged in open coding of the data in the transcript, the suggested data analysis process as suggested by Litosseliti (2003) was followed. First, the researcher read

the transcript for general impressions. Next, the transcripts were reread while looking for specific opinions or topics as well as any parts that may answer the proposed research questions. While reading the transcript a third time, the researcher identified each section with a code word. Once the coding was completed, the researcher ensured the categories for the code words were exhaustive and exclusive (Gillham, 2000).

In conclusion, the research methods outlined above allowed the researcher to lay a solid foundation in an understudied area. Furthermore, the data from this qualitative phase will give future researchers the potential to apply the research findings of this qualitative research and develop more statistical results through quantitative methods that support the findings of this phase.

Chapter 4- Qualitative Phase Findings

A total of five research questions were developed for the qualitative phase. These questions were used to guide the researcher in discovering the perceptions that students hold about the foundational factors of a higher education institution's reputation. More specifically, the research questions looked to identify certain public relations tactics that the university is using that may be hurting or maintaining its reputation and the tactics that it may need to consider in order to improve its reputation.

RQ1: How do current students evaluate the reputation of their university?

Multiple participants across all three focus groups brought up the idea that their university is known as a "party school." Although the participants believed this is the reputation that their university is known for by outsiders, the majority felt as though this was not an actual representation of what the university is really about. One respondent said, "Well, we are considered a party school from the outside" (R1- Focus group 3). One student even defended against this party reputation, saying,

Well to businesses, to future employers, and let them know that yeah these guys came from our university, but they're not just going to party and ruin your business. They are going to be hardworking employees and are going to do a good job for you. You've got to get a better reputation for the students that are going out into the workforce (R1- Focus group 2).

A participant from a different focus group added,

Yeah, after I came here, I didn't think it was so bad. What people were saying, like in high school, people would talk about our university and stuff, like parties and stuff, but

after you got here you were like, oh this is a really nice place and stuff like that (R1- Focus group 1).

When looking at the perceptions of how current students evaluate the reputation of their university, participants from two of the three focus groups mentioned their university is known for being the backup school or the second choice for most high school students. One respondent commented, “Our university is always, it sadly is always the backup school” (R3- Focus group 3). Fortunately, this negative definition of the reputation for their university is something the students are eager and willing to help change.

RQ2: What factors do students identify as contributing to their university's reputation?

The analysis of the focus group data based on these research questions led to the development of five major themes in regards to reputation in the context of a university. The first major theme was the external perception of the university. The second theme presented by the participants was a sense of unity among students as well as between faculty and students. The third theme was the visible outcomes that occur as a result of being a student at the university, while the fourth theme was how it compared to other universities. Finally, the fifth theme brought up was the health and safety of students attending the institution. Most of the detailed findings of these themes are presented under this research question, which deals with the factors that students see as playing a role in their university's reputation.

External perceptions of the university. Participants across all three focus groups brought up the thought that the way outsiders talk about or refer to their university has a huge impact on its reputation. One student gave an example of how outsiders may view the university in a negative manner even without any direct experience with the university. In this case, the participant spoke of his high school statistics teacher and he said,

He stopped the whole discussion to let me know that he plans to see me back in Woodbridge working at a McDonald's drive thru in two years... You know I went back a year later because I was part of the ROTC program in my high school to visit the program, and I ran into him. He said, you know, how is school and stuff, and I was like I'm still not at the McDonald's drive thru. I'm doing well. I was like I just want you to know whatever perception you have of [this university] is totally false. And I asked him, it came to my mind, and I asked him if he had ever been down to [this school]. His

answer was no. So, what are you building your basis off of? What you hear from outside sources (R5- Focus group 3).

The focus groups also presented the idea that external perceptions are influential on the university's reputation when those external people have a firsthand experience with the university, but this experience is a biased view of what the university is really about. Respondent 2 from the third focus group added,

Every school does the same thing, it's just like I feel like the reputation of [our university] comes from people outside who visit during Quadfest, and since we are so small we have stuff like that, like Quadfest, and all these other events. Like Halloween is important, and St. Patrick's day is important, and people like literally come up from everywhere to here, and that's where they get all, whatever, they see people wasted in the streets, when they come back home, but they don't live here every day and go to school every day and sit and see all the frat and sorority people, fraternity sorry, sorority people sitting in the library all day long. You know? They don't see that part either, or like the people who are doing internships and having jobs and going to work and stuff like that (R2- Focus group 3).

A participant from another focus group brought up the external perceptions of the academic standards at the university. The participant commented,

Well, I think you are right. I think they all have equal impact, but honestly as far as our reputation I think that like the outsiders have the most impact because they are the ones talking the most about it. I mean I could sit here and tell you about it all day long. [My university] is great because I go there, but if I have, like when I went home, I went to a

breakfast place, and I had a [school] hoodie on, and the six people that were like sitting near me, it's a place where you can like all sit together, they literally were like all bashing me, bashing my school, and I've never met these people, like bashing me, telling me, basically telling me that I was stupid because I could only go to [this university], and I literally said hi my name is... Like that's all I've said to them at this point. They just started bouncing off. I think that you can have like all your students say what they want, but once something is put in people's heads, it is really hard to change, especially if they don't go here (R3- Focus group 3).

Although the focus groups consistently presented the idea that the perceptions that outsiders hold about their university are important and influential, the participants also talked about the importance of the role that firsthand experience plays in the reputation of the university. In fact, some students emphasized how the reputation of the university they held in their head changed once they actually had a firsthand encounter with the organization. One participant said,

I think based on the school as a whole, not just within professors, it mostly comes from other students' experiences because before I came here, the only thing I knew was what people had told me, so I had a reputation in my head of what the school was, and then when I got here, my own reputation changed completely from what I had heard. In a positive way (R3- Focus group 2).

Another participant added, "A lot of students they may see that [this university] has a negative reputation from outsiders looking in, but that may not be the case when you get in here" (R4- Focus group 2). One participant from another focus group gave a personal example from her

experience while she was searching for a graduate university. She said, “I was [thinking] I was going to not go there because I had been listening to what these people had said about it, and then I am so thankful I came here” (R1- Focus group 3). Again, the students believed the external perceptions of others have a large influence on their university’s reputation, but they do not believe these perceptions are accurately representing the university.

Sense of unity among current university students. For this university in particular, the students in the focus groups felt as though a vital part of a reputation comes from a sense of unity not only amongst a university’s students but also between the students and administration. One subcategory of this sense of unity was the university’s size. Participants in all three of the focus groups mentioned the importance of the size of the university on its reputation. One participant said, “I think because it’s not more of a party school than other schools, it’s just so small that it seems like it is more concentrated. I think that can play into the reputation” (R1- Focus group 3). Two of the three focus groups specifically mentioned impact of classroom size.

Another subcategory all three focus groups mentioned under the sense of unity and its influence on university reputation was school spirit. The groups consistently mentioned that the university needed something to be associated with to enhance its reputation. One participant said, “They must not have any school spirit, which means the students doesn’t really care about their education because they don’t really care about their school” (R3- Focus group 3). For the current situation, the students believe their university’s association with Quadfest, which is an event that is no longer sponsored by the university and involves a lot of parties thrown off-campus, leads to a negative reputation for the university overall because that is the primary event that first comes to mind when talking about this university.

More specifically, all three groups were really passionate about the importance of and suggested having a strong athletic program in terms of building a more positive reputation. One participant said, “Another reputation thing that I think affects us, and this is going to sound really silly, is the fact that we don’t have a football team. We don’t have a lot of school spirit” (R3- Focus group 3). A participant from a different focus group commented, “If we were more spirited, like school spirited, to not have a football team doesn’t help, but our reputation would be ten times better if we were more school spirited” (R6- Focus group 1). Another participant from the third focus group added,

I think athletics because of the idea of what athletic teams are. It’s a team. So you are talking about wanting to make our university not so divided, and I feel like athletics has a lot to do with that... So, I didn’t know that I could go to games to support people, and it’s like when you give everybody, they feel like they can all come together, it’s like when you’re supporting something, you’re doing it as a whole. You all feel like you are [together] because you are supporting those things. I think, I don’t know, sports are important to America. It’s what we are. Part of what we are. So, I think having athletic teams, promoting what we do have, showing how good we are at things...” (R3).

The participants also suggested that if their university was not able to further develop its athletics program, then the university needs some sort of outlet for students to direct their school spirit towards.

Additionally, the students believed that the university should be cohesive and needs healthy relationships among its students as well as between students and its administration. A participant made the comment, “Well, I think a lot of administration doesn’t know a lot about

what's going on on campus. The university's president came to my class last year, it was an hour class, and by the time I left, I was like wow, she really has no idea what is going on" (R2- Focus group 1).

Other participants really emphasized that the role and relationship of the organizational leader with members, in this case the university's president with students, is critical to the university's reputation. One student said, "That's another thing with reputation. [the president] needs to put her face out there more" (R2- Focus group 2). Another participant in the same focus group added, "I mean that's part of the problem. She doesn't interact with anyone" (R4- Focus group 1), and a different participant added, "There is a big power distance" (R3- Focus group 1).

A different focus group brought up the fact that a negative relationship, or even a complete lack of a relationship, leads to a lack of support. One participant said, "I feel like a lot of the problem with her is a sense of students viewing her negatively. So they don't want to support it" (R4- Focus group 2). A lack of support by any organization's members increases the likelihood of having detrimental effects on its reputation, which is what students seem to perceive as happening at this university.

Visible outcomes of attending the university. Another consistent comment made by the focus groups was the visible outcomes that can be attributed to students who attend or have attended the university. All three of the focus groups brought up the role that the standards of the university played in its reputation. Participants in two of the three focus groups specifically mentioned the impact grade point average requirements play on the university's reputation. One student said,

I feel like if you're letting in that many people whose GPAs are a 2.5, or a 2.1 or 3 or whatever it is, I feel like that kind of reflects on the academics that we have here. It's like, oh well, we just want students who want to grow. That is what we are focusing on. We are not really focusing on your education. To me, that itself is negative. People would look at that and be like, um, I will apply there just in case I don't get in anywhere else (R4- Focus group 2).

Another participant added,

I don't know. I agree with what you are saying about [the university], but I don't know if the issue really is the fact that everyone's partying, or the fact that years ago, the GPA requirement was so low to get in. So you had a lot of, I don't want to say low quality students coming here just to get here because they couldn't get into anywhere else (R6- Focus group 3).

A very prominent factor that all three focus groups argued had a significant influence on the university's reputation was the role that alumni serve. For this university in particular, the student participants believed that the way certain alumni speak of their alma mater has a negative impact on the university's reputation, but they also believed that showcasing the successful students that graduated from the university has a positive impact on reputation. One participant who serves as a tour guide for the university gave an example of alumni speaking of the university while on a tour with their sons and daughters who were looking at possibly becoming students. She said,

Like the alumni make it so much worse. I'm a tour guide, and all the alumni I talked too, even back at home, are like I remember my days at Raddy, and I'm like shut up I just told

these people it wasn't like that. I'm sorry, but the alumni are a huge freaking problem. On my tours, when they bring in the kids and stuff when I was doing tours, they literally would be like yeah when I was here, I was right there, like doing that. I'm like shhhhh, don't say that. Stop talking! I'm like, no it's a dry campus, you definitely can't be chugging 12 beers through your nose on Muse Quad (R3- Focus group 3).

In response, another participant added, "The alumni, they're the ones who spent four or five... years here, I mean if they are talking about [their university] like that... I think the alumni do have a little bit more impact" (R5- Focus group 3).

Several students across the focus groups believed alumni seemed to hold a high level of credibility, which gives their comments more influence on outsiders. When the moderator asked participants to identify people or things they would tend to trust as a source ensuring they would receive a quality education at the university, one focus group participant from the third focus group responded, "I would say the alumni. Like other people that have graduated from [this university], you know, that were old and had jobs" (R3- Focus group 1). The same participant later suggested,

I think they should show off their alumni too because... I'll find out later in class when we have people come and speak that have graduated, and they're doing so well, and you never hear about those stories until those classes. (R3-Focus group 1).

In response, another student added,

"It's like when we got hired for work study like she would always talk about how well people do after they graduate... She has examples of people that have graduated and went

on to do really great stuff... From the outside you never really see it” (R8- Focus group 1).

The students believed that successful alumni play a role in the university’s reputation, but the university needs to take the initiative to showcase their successes. One student said the university needs to send the message that “if you go to [this university], this is what can happen” (R3- Focus group 1).

As seen above, the dominant subcategories that were brought up under the theme of visible outcomes that occur as a result of attending the university were the academic standards of the university as well as the alumni. The participants further broke down the alumni subcategory into the negative impact of the comments and word-of-mouth as presented by alumni to outsiders as well as the positive impact of showcasing the academic profiles of successful alumni.

Comparison to other universities. While this theme was not as prominent in terms of depth as the other former themes, it was still significant in terms of its breadth. One participant commented on the university in comparison to nearby universities and what they have to offer. He said, “...When you go to a college sometimes you will look at what they offer outside of classes... if I go to Tech I can go to football on Saturday. With [our university], there’s not really much of that sports.” (R8- Focus group 1).

A participant from a different focus group used a similar comparison strategy in describing the university’s reputation but focused more on the academic comparison between the universities. She commented,

Compared to JMU and ODU and Tech and other schools like that, [our university’s] acceptance rate is 70% or 80%. They accept so many students, and it’s like if we became

more selective and we lowered that number, maybe people would see us as competition instead of oh well I will go to [this university] until I can transfer to get in a better school (R4- Focus group 2).

Similarly, a participant from another focus group added,

And that's changing a little bit. Like it used to be... that's big thing on our reputation is well anybody can get into [this university]. Which I mean, I work in admissions, and that's changing, like it's slowly going up, but we're still no Tech. We're still nobody... I've never heard someone go I'm just really stressed, I just applied to [this university], and I've never heard somebody say that, unfortunately. I hear that about Tech. Like I just put my Tech app in, and I'm really nervous, but nobody says that about [our school] (R3- Focus group 3).

One student brought up forum rankings of the university in determining its reputation. He said, "There were a few forums where they had a couple different schools... comparing two different schools and in which ways they were better. Yeah, that did influence me there" (R1- Focus group 2). Another participant added, "I like where it stood in the state. For the division that I wanted to go to, I looked where it ranked" (R3- Focus group 2). The majority of the mentions the students made in regards to comparison to other universities came through the examples they provided rather than explicit statements.

Health and safety rules and regulations of the university. A lot of the participants agreed that the increase in the university's rules and regulations against drinking negatively impacted its overall reputation. Again, most of the participants saw drinking as a reputational issue for their university, and they also saw the influence of the strictness of the university

against these drinking behaviors. With this in mind, one participant said, “Maybe if they did bring drinking back on campus it could be more supervised, and then maybe it wouldn’t get looked at as badly” (R1- Focus group 1). A participant from a different focus group added, “It’s kind of like when you’re a little kid, and your parents tell you no. You’re going to do the exact opposite” (R5- Focus group 2). A participant also from the second focus group said, “The university itself is a huge part of the town, and it just branches out, and I guess it leaves a little bit of a bad taste in everyone’s mouth when you go too strict and people start to rebel” (R1- Focus group 2). A third participant commented,

I think the stricter they get on the alcohol policies, the more media attention it is going to get too, which brings it to other people’s attention in the state[s] that are going to send their students [here], they’re like... look at how many alcohol violations they had last year, just because the news is putting the statistics up there. Even if the statistics aren’t even higher from years past, they are still getting a lot more attention than they were before (R2- Focus group 2).

The participants consistently referred to the university’s restrictions in conjunction with drinking behaviors. There were not any mentions of the influence other regulations or policies have on the university’s reputation.

RQ3: Which public relations tactics do students perceive to be the most beneficial to increase their university's reputation?

These focus groups also found that students were consistently willing to offer suggestions in order to help repair the inaccurate reputation that is being portrayed about their university. The majority of the participants agreed that the university should not place a lot of their communication plan focus on advertising, but they suggested that the university should engage in more public relations efforts to help its overall reputation. Some of the participants felt as though advertising would have a negative impact on the university. One student said, "For a second I was thinking like a TV commercial, but then I think people would think we are...too desperate. Like...a community college or something" (R1, Focus group 1). A different participant added, "I don't think advertising is doing anything," while another participant responded, "No, and it's kind of embarrassing" (R5- Focus group 1; R6- Focus group 1). Also, in regards to the advertising function of an academic university, a fourth participant said, "When you force too much it just kind of stops" (R8- Focus group 1).

Similarly, participants in the second focus group insinuated that a university needs to focus more on relationship building with outsiders rather than simply advertising. One student in the second focus group critiqued their university by saying, "I don't think they follow up with a lot of stuff either" (R2- Focus group 2). A second participant agreed. Critiquing the university's response to violence incidents occurring near the university's campus, respondent 2 also said,

That would make a lot of people feel more comfortable. A lot of the robberies last year, at least give us updates throughout, or every couple of weeks let us know what is going

on. I mean you don't even know if they caught the people that committed the robbery (Focus group 2).

Students felt strongly about the factor of personal relationships between university representatives and outsiders and its impact on the university's reputation. Public appearances as public relations efforts on behalf of the university seemed to be very important to many of the students. This was not something that the students felt their university did effectively, especially in regards to the president of university. One student said, "That's another thing with reputation. She needs to put her face out there more. No one ever sees this lady" (R2- Focus group 1). Similarly, another student said later in the focus group, "I mean that's part of the problem. She doesn't interact with anyone" (R2- Focus group 1). A different participant made the suggestion that "she could at least walk by the Bonnie when the groups have signup stuff. She could come by and talk to them about their groups or something" (R8- Focus group 1). A participant from a different focus group also said,

A lot of people say they have never met her too though. I think she needs to have more of a, be more social with the students at the university. Maybe have meetings with them once a month in the Bonnie Auditorium where you can go and just ask questions if you want (R2- Focus group 2).

A couple of participants responded to this comment by giving examples of the impact these appearances have on the students and university as a whole. One student said, "That's like, my cousin goes to University of Maryland, Baltimore College, and he said that their president walks around campus... and they all feel like they can talk to him and approach him. I think I have seen her on campus once" (R4- Focus group 2). Another added, "That's how my brother's college is

too, their president... and he goes to every single athletic game you can think of... He is always on campus. He knows all the students. If he doesn't know you, he will just be like... can I join you with lunch" (R5- Focus group 2)?

Another student commented, "And if we had a cool president, like someone that we felt like cared about us, that would be better too" (R3- Focus group 1). "[The president] needs to get out there and interact with us, not just sit there and be that authority figure" (R5- Focus group 2).

Another student added,

I feel like she is almost like, when she does come out, or getting [her] for an appearance or to come speak at something, it is like an honor, I feel like she is on a pedestal up here, and then it's like everyone else, and then it's like students down here. We don't look to her as like oh she's the president of our university. We look at her at like oh she's the president. I don't know. I feel like we... can't relate, she doesn't relate to us (R4- Focus group 2).

A second student responded with a very bold statement that demonstrated the impact the students perceived developing out of such public relationships by saying, "To be able to care about the university, you have to be able to show that you care about the students" (R1- Focus group 2).

These public appearances do not necessarily have to come from the president of the university to have an impact. Instead, a similar impact can be made with another authority figure of the university as one student said,

Don Appiarus [Dean of Students], I've seen him. I'm Vice President of the diversity awareness programming board, and he is coming to our event tonight. Like, we sent him an e-mail. It was really last minute, and he is coming, and he is bringing three people.

Just having that support, and having him come out it's nice to see people who maybe have the authority, but still feel comfortable being around their students and supporting them (R4- Focus group 2).

Students are in favor of public relations tactics on behalf of the university. They want a healthy relationship and open communication with their university rather than a one-way type of communication.

RQ4: How do students view the influence of how their university is portrayed in the media (including social media) on the university's overall reputation?

In regards to how the university being in the media affects its reputation, a different participant commented,

That is how they are going to start defining the reputation is the more they are in the media, they need to respond to that, and the more they respond to it in a positive way, turn the negative into a positive, it is going to start forming that reputation, and that party school reputation is going to slowly diminish (R5- Focus group 2).

A second participant responded to this comment by adding a sense of urgency for the university's response to its current reputational situation,

And if they don't do anything it is going to snowball because from what I understand, our student population is going up every year. The freshman class keeps getting bigger. You are going to have more occurrences, and it is just going to snowball until everyone just completely thinks it is a party school and that's it (R2- Focus group 2).

While the idea of the portrayal of the university in social media did not receive a lot of focus from the participants, several significant comments were made in regards to this subject.

One student suggested, “They could put...a link on the website and just have it go to a Facebook page” (R9- Focus group 1). Another participant in a different focus group commented,

Twitter, Facebook. I feel like those things are kind of what most students rely on now for information, so if they are giving the information out there in convenient ways, I feel like it is more receptive versus like an e-mail where you get it, and you... delete it because you have 20 other e-mails (R4- Focus group 2).

Participants in another focus group added more depth to this social media topic by saying that reputation of the university conveyed through social media needs to be combated in an official manner by the university’s staff. The participants did not feel as though students could use social media to overcome the negative portrayal of their university. One student said, “Social media, we wouldn’t be able to counter-act the Quadfest movement, I guess, whatever it is because there’s still those students here to encourage it” (R5- Focus group 3). Students recognize the importance of having a presence in the media, and they believe university administrators need to make a conscious effort to increase the university’s overall media presence.

RQ5: What is the perceived impact of a university’s reputation on a student’s level of trust that it will fulfill its educational mission?

Students across all three of the focus groups commented on how other people’s remarks about the university affected how much they trusted the university to deliver a quality college education. One respondent remarked, “I went home, and I told everyone that I got into [this university], and a couple people reacted and said they were sorry” (R7- Focus group 1) She added, “Yeah, it made me a little, I don’t know, nervous about coming down here” (R7- Focus

group 1). Another participant talked about how the size of a university affects its reputation, which in turn affects the college experience. This student said,

I think when you are in smaller size classes and stuff like that, the reputation is like high school, it's like you're not getting a real college experience. Sometimes [with] the bigger classroom size you get the reputation of being a number, like your students are just a number, and you're not getting the close education (R3- Focus group 3).

Another participant talked about her experience before coming to the university,

Before I came here, I didn't really have any perceptions... Then, once I got accepted, and started telling people and more people found out about [this university]... I would talk to people from [here]... and they would be like [that school] is a party school, and there is nothing to do there, so that is why everyone just parties all the time...It's... like you're not going to get a job when you get out of there... So my perception was very negative coming [here] (R2- Focus group 3).

Again, another participant added with her personal experience,

I'm going to be honest. When I was applying to grad schools, I was applying to like Wake Forest and all these top notch schools, and [this university] was... the bottom of the barrel I guess. But then, stuff happened with my application... and [this] was the one that worked out, and so I was like okay, well I will go check it out. And then... I came here, and I loved it. It was... the cleanest campus, I came here during the summer...and the people were so nice. I was [thinking] I was going to not go there because I had been listening to what these people had said about it, and then I am so thankful I came here.

The quality of education is good. I guess I had been, when compared to other schools, you're like it's not as good (R1- Focus group 3).

Students in two different focus groups also brought up the importance of rankings and accreditation and their impact on the university's reputation. A participant said, "I like where it stood in the state. For the division that I wanted to go to, I looked where it ranked" (R3- Focus group 2). In another focus group, one student commented, "I never would have come to a school if it didn't have [accreditation] because I was going into counseling and so I needed [it]" (R1- Focus group 3).

Several of the participants in the first focus group were really adamant about holding the most trust in people who had actual experience with the university. Some of these people included alumni and advisors. One student even mentioned his or her tour advisor. When the idea of showcasing famous alumni from the university was addressed, the students did not see that as an avenue that would garner their trust in a university to give a quality education. "If it was someone that just got a really good job that graduated from here, I would see that is trust. Famous person I wouldn't see so much as trust" (R6- Focus group 1). The participants emphasized the importance reputation plays on trust because of the level of awareness they admitted they placed on what others said about their university. This was also demonstrated by some of the participants' effort to research the university in regards to its ranking and accreditation status.

The findings that developed from the focus groups in this qualitative phase were used in the development of the pilot study used in the next quantitative phase. The next chapter describes the methodology for this quantitative phase.

Chapter 5- Quantitative Phase Methodology

Survey Participants

The survey data for this pilot study were collected using a convenience sample. Current students in courses including introduction to communication, general education, public speaking, introduction to public relations, introduction to advertising, and public relations management classes were asked to participate in the survey. Some of these participants were offered extra credit for their participation in the survey. Additional participants were also contacted directly through e-mail by the researcher to take part in the survey. In total, 223 participants took the survey.

Survey Procedures

The 48 questions of this pilot survey were developed from the themes that developed in the focus groups of the qualitative phase as well as from a few secondary sources. The survey was created and delivered through an anonymous survey link through Qualtrics survey software. The survey questions were presented in a random order to each participant and were followed by a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

Prior to the presentation of the survey questions, an online consent form approved by the university's IRB was built into the survey. Following completion of the survey questions, the student was taken to another page with a second anonymous survey link leading to a separate survey where the participant was asked to enter his or her name, professor's name offering the extra credit (if applicable), student identification number, and e-mail address. This second survey was used to compile a list of participants that the student sent to professors who agreed to offer extra credit for their students' participation. The information the students entered into the second survey were sent to the faculty advisor's Qualtrics account rather than the researcher's account to

ensure the survey data could not be traced with any of the participant's identifiable information. The faculty advisor was in charge of sending the list of participants to professors to ensure complete anonymity.

Survey Data Analysis

The data from the survey responses in Qualtrics was downloaded as a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file and included the raw data along with variable and value labels. In order to measure for outliers within this data set, a Mahalanobis distance test was performed. Five cases were judged to be multivariate outliers based on the results of this test and were removed from the data set. An additional five participants were removed because they either did not complete enough of the survey's questions or gave the same response to each of the items. Thus, a total of 10 cases were deleted.

After this elimination, results from a total of 210 surveys were used for data analysis. Guilford (1954) suggested a sample size of at least 200 is adequate for conducting a factor analysis. There were several instances where there were missing responses within these cases, but these missing responses appeared to be at random and not intentional on behalf of the participants. One item had five missing responses and other items had missing cases ranging from zero to three. Since an adequate factor analysis requires a number be present for each case, the missing responses were replaced with the mean of each of the items.

The items from the pilot survey were broken down into two separate categories. The first category included the items pertaining to the students' opinions towards their university's reputation. The second category included the items that revolved around the students' perceptions of the things that influence their university's reputation. One of the primary reasons

the researcher chose to separate the opinion items from the perception of influencers on the university's reputation was to strengthen the cohesiveness between the constructs. The results of the factor analysis for each category were used to combine similar components of the survey and to reduce the total number of variables.

Once the data were organized, and the appropriate cases were removed from the data set, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy was performed for each category. Results from this test indicated the KMO measure for the opinion items was .80 and for the items on the students' perceptions of influencers on reputation was .78. Both KMO measures are considered adequate for a factor analysis to be performed on a pilot test. From this data file, the researcher and the principal investigator conducted an exploratory factor analysis to determine the strength of how each of the pilot survey's items or questions fit together.

One criterion that was used to determine how many factors should be present was the scree plot proposed by Cattell (1966). The breaks in the scree plot for the first set of questions looking at the opinions of the university's students on its reputation indicated there should be a two-, three-, four-, five-, or six-factor solution. The breaks in the scree plot for the second set of questions looking at the students' perceptions of what influences the reputation of their university indicated there should be a four-, five-, or six-factor solution. Finally, this quantitative phase used a principal axis factoring extraction method and a varimax with Kaiser normalization rotation method.

Chapter 6- Quantitative Phase Findings

Based on the suggestion for a study with a sample size of about 200 by Hair, Tatham, Anderson, and Black (1998), the questions from the pilot survey that fell below a 0.4 factor loading were deleted from the survey altogether. For the first category of items focusing on the students' personal opinions towards their university, this eliminated two of the 14 total survey items. For the second category of items focusing on the things students perceive to influence the reputation of the university, this eliminated nine of the 33 total survey items. A list of the original 48 items before any item elimination occurred is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Original Scale Items

Items Focusing on Students' Opinions on Their University's Reputation

- I think this university is a below average university.
- I am proud to be an RU student.
- I think this university is an average university.
- My family holds a positive image of the university.
- I think this university is an above average university.
- My view of this university has changed in a positive way since I came here.
- My friends hold a positive image of the university.
- I feel RU professors care about my success.
- My university is often seen as a backup school.
- I have become friends with a diverse group of other RU students.
- I have developed good friendships with other students at RU.
- I am satisfied with RU athletic programs.
- I feel safe off campus at my university.
- I feel safe on campus at my university.

Items Focusing on Students' Perceptions of Influencers on Their University's Reputation

- Boosting the athletic programs at RU would increase my satisfaction with the university.
- A university with a successful athletic program will be viewed more favorably than a university with an unsuccessful athletic program.
- A football team would bring a sense of togetherness to the university's community.
- An increase in the school spirit of the university would increase my level of satisfaction with the university.
- A lack of school spirit at my university affects the togetherness of the university in a negative way.
- What my family thinks of my university influences my view of the school.
- Raising the entry requirements for incoming students would improve people's perceptions about the university.
- What my friends think of my university influences my view of the school.
- We need to change what our students think about the university's reputation before we can change what outsiders think.
- A change in the university's reputation begins with what students say about their university.
- My first-hand experience as a student is the most important influence on my view of the university.
- The types of academic programs the university offers affect its reputation.

How the university compares to other schools affects its reputation.

Interaction between faculty and students improves the university's reputation.

A university with lower entry standards (i.e. GPA) will be viewed more negatively than a university with higher entry standards.

The university needs a specific event that will generate positive publicity.

I do not want my professors to speak negatively of RU.

Meeting successful alumni from RU makes me more confident in the education I am receiving.

It bothers me when outsiders speak negatively of my university.

Drawing attention to successful RU alumni would change outsiders' view of the university in a positive way.

A university with a high graduation rate tends to be viewed more positively.

A change in reputation begins with changing outsiders' views of the university.

Universities known as "party schools" do not have positive reputations.

Student drinking at RU harms the university's reputation.

Universities known as a second-choice tend to have an unfavorable reputation.

Hearing negative comments about my university makes me think I am not getting as good of an education as students at other universities.

A university with low academic standards for current students tends to be viewed more negatively.

A university with students who engage in safe behaviors is more likely to be viewed more positively than a university with students who engage in unsafe behaviors.

A university with strict safety rules has a less favorable reputation.

The more strict a university is in its rules, the more likely its students will be dissatisfied.

The amount of alcohol students drink influences the university's reputation in a positive way.

A smaller university will be viewed more favorably than a larger university.

A change in reputation begins with the communication of the university's administration.

The exploratory factor analyses of the 12 remaining items in the first category and the 24 remaining items in the second category lead to the finding of three and five factors respectively. The factor analysis from the data collected through the pilot survey for the first category of items dealing with the opinions of current students towards the university resulted in the following three factors:

- (1) *General opinion*. Most of these items are general attitudes held by the students and others towards the university. The Cronbach's α measure for this group of items was .80.
- (2) *Relationship strength*. This grouping of variables deal with the diversity as well as the quality of relationships students have developed thus far during their time at the university. For these two items, $r = .44$ and $p < .001$.
- (3) *Safety*. This grouping of variables measure how safe students felt both on and off campus at the university. For these two items, $r = .63$ and $p < .001$.

The factor analysis of the remaining scale items that focused on the components the students perceived to have an influence on RU's reputation resulted in the following five factors:

- (1) *Sense of unity/togetherness*. For the most part, this grouping of survey items deal with school spirit among a university's members. More specifically, many of the items looked at school spirit that may be developed through a university's athletic teams. The Cronbach's α value for this set of items fell relatively high at .79.
- (2) *First-hand experience with the university*. This grouping of survey items deal with the first-hand experience students have with the university. Moreover, these items deal with the influence that students themselves serve on the overall university's reputation. This group also includes the actual interactions students have with their professors and the

academic programs they are involved in. The reliability measure for this group of items was .697.

(3) *Positive representatives of the university.* This grouping of items includes two items that focus on the alumni of the university, and the way in which primary publics talk about or refer to the university. This group of items demonstrates the measure of how students want to be portrayed to outsiders. This group of items has a reliability measure of .687.

(4) *External perceptions.* These items focus on how outsiders (the family, friends, students at other universities, etc.) speak about or refer to their university in casual conversation. The Cronbach's α value of reliability for this particular group of items was .588.

(5) *Behavioral strictness.* This grouping of items revolves around the rules and regulations the university enforces in regards to its students' behaviors during their time on or off campus. The reliability measure for this group of items was .610.

The factor loadings for each item from the principal axis factor analysis are presented in the tables below. Table 2 includes the items focusing on the opinions current students hold towards the university. Table 4 includes the items focusing on what students perceive to be influencers on the university's reputation.

Table 4

Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation of Student Opinion Items

	Factor Loading		
	F1	F2	F3
General Opinion ($M = 3.63$)			
I think this university is a below average university	-.62		
I am proud to be an RU student	-.60		
I think this university is an average university	-.60		
My family holds a positive image of RU	.58		
I think this university is an above average university	.56		
My view of this university has changed in a positive way since I came here	.50		
My friends hold a positive view of RU	.46		
I feel RU professors care about my success	.42		
Strong Relationships ($M = 4.11$)			
I have become friends with a diverse group of other RU students		.76	
I have developed good friendships with other students at RU		.59	
Safety ($M = 3.83$)			
I feel safe off campus at RU		.91	
I feel safe on campus at RU		.65	

Table 5

Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation of Reputation Influences

	Factor Loading				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Sense of Unity ($M = 3.78$)					
Boosting the athletic programs at RU would increase my satisfaction with the university	.68				
A university with a successful athletic program will be viewed more favorably than a university with an unsuccessful athletic program	.67				
A football team would bring a sense of togetherness to the RU community	.58				
An increase in the school spirit of RU would increase my level of satisfaction with the university	.49				
A lack of school spirit at RU affects the togetherness of the university in a negative way	.49				
What my family thinks of RU influences my view of the school	.40				
First-hand Experience ($M = 3.96$)					
We need to change what our students think about RU's reputation before we can change what outsiders think	.60				
A change in RU's reputation begins with what students say about their university	.50				
My first-hand experience as a student is the most important influence on my view of RU	.50				
The types of academic programs RU offers affect its reputation	.50				
How RU compares to other schools affects its reputation	.47				
Interaction between faculty and students improves RU's reputation	.45				
Positive Representatives of the University ($M = 4.01$)					
I do not want my professors to speak negatively of RU	.58				
Meeting successful alumni from RU makes me more confident in the education I am receiving	.56				
It bothers me when outsiders speak negatively of RU	.55				
Drawing attention to successful RU alumni would change outsiders' view of the university in a positive way	.50				

External Perceptions ($M = 3.14$)

Universities known as "party schools" do not have positive reputations	.71
Student drinking at RU harms the university's reputation	.51
Universities known as a second-choice tend to have an unfavorable reputation	.48
Hearing negative comments about RU makes me think I am not getting as good of an education as students at other universities	.41

Behavioral Restrictions ($M = 3.19$)

A university with strict safety rules has a less favorable reputation	.58
The more strict RU is in its rules, the more likely its students will be dissatisfied	.56
The amount of alcohol students drink influences RU's reputation in a positive way	.45

The first two items in the *general opinion* factor that looked at students' views if the university was a below average or above average university were reverse coded. Once these items were reverse coded, the mean for this factor was 3.63. This suggests that students seem to have a more positive view of the university's reputation than the view they believe outsiders hold. Overall, the data suggest students do have a somewhat positive view of the university and are proud to be students.

The means for most of the factors shown in Table 3 and Table 4 are suggestive that the participants in the quantitative phase of this study tend to agree with the factors that were found in the qualitative phase. This strengthens the argument that the factors identified in the qualitative phase do in fact influence a university's reputation. Since the means of the factors of *external perceptions* ($M = 3.14$) and *behavioral restrictions* ($M = 3.19$) were lower in comparison to the means of the other factors, this suggests that these factors may not have as large of an influence as the other factors.

These types of inferences are one of the primary reasons this pilot study was conducted. However, it is important to keep in mind that the respondents to this pilot study are not very representative since most were communication students. Future researchers should gather a more representative sample to solidify support for these assumptions.

Chapter 7- Discussion

This study found that four of the five themes of university reputation that were presented in the qualitative phase were supported by the factors that developed out of the pilot study after the exploratory factor analysis: *external perception, sense of unity, visible outcomes, and the health/safety of the university*. One factor that did not align between the qualitative and quantitative studies was *comparison to other universities*. Although there is a need for more testing and refining, this overlap between the qualitative and quantitative research phases demonstrates the importance and usability of the preliminary scale used in the pilot study to assess the reputation of other universities. The primary purpose behind this entire research study was to develop a potential scale that universities could use in identifying and ranking the factors their students may see as critical or unimportant to their specific university's reputation, which is likely to vary depending on geographic location, size, demographics of its students, etc.

Current students evaluate the university's reputation. The first research question of this study looked to get an understanding of how current students think about their university and how they believe others think of their university. The qualitative phase revealed that most of the students felt their university was mostly known for being a "party school;" however, most of the students were also in agreement that this party school reputation was not an accurate representation of what the university was really about. In fact, most of the students felt bothered that the organization they are a member of is thought of in such a negative manner.

Following along with how others perceive the university in a negative manner, the participants said that their university is also commonly referred to as the "backup school" or a second-choice for most high school students; however, this isn't how the current students want to

be perceived. They want to be seen as hardworking potential employees who know how to get the job done efficiently and effectively.

The strong opinions of the students and the frustrations students felt with the misalignment of their perceptions of their university versus outsiders' perceptions of their university encouraged the researcher to separate some of the items in the quantitative phase. The opinion based items were separated from the items dealing more with the specific influences students perceive to be on the university's reputation. A look at the factor analysis of the opinion items show that *general reputation*, *relationship strength*, and *safety* are primary factors in a university's reputation. The inconsistent findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies indicates further research needs to be conducted with a larger sample and the results analyzed before the scale is finalized.

Contributing factors to the university's reputation as perceived by current students.

The second research question of this study was a little more specific in identifying the factors students perceived to have an influence on their university's reputation, rather than just defining the university's reputation. This led to the development of five major themes, which students believed served as those influences: *external perceptions*, *sense of unity*, *visible outcomes*, *comparison to other universities*, and *health and safety*.

The first most common influence mentioned by the focus group participants was the external perceptions of outsiders. This aligns with the findings of Sung and Yang (2008), who concluded that students hold more value towards the perceptions that others hold of an institution rather than their own perceptions. This finding is also supported by the model proposed by Vrontis, Thrassou, and Melanthiou (2007), which shows where the influence of outsiders is most

important during the decision process on which college to attend. Interestingly, students believe these external perceptions are generally inaccurate perceptions of the university, and they usually come from outsiders who have no history of direct experiences with the university and are just basing their attitudes on secondary information, or they come from outsiders who may have only one direct unfavorable experience with the university during a time when the university was not under normal conditions. For this university in particular, this tainted external perception comes from outsiders who attend the annual event of Quadfest, which was originally a university sanctioned event held both on and off campus, but when the university revoked its sponsorship and promotion of the event, students carried it off campus with lots of unorganized parties.

The results of phase one indicate the importance of having first-hand experience with the university. In fact, several participants admitted their perceived reputation of the university changed once they came to the university. One student said, “I was going to not go there because I had been listening to what these people had said about it, and then I am so thankful I came here” (R1- Focus group 3). This finding indicates that reputation may not serve as a deterrent on a student’s decision to attend a university, however, it may affect the level of encouragement students feel in making that final commitment. It also indicates reputation may not be as important once a student is actually enrolled at a university, since the student now has a legitimate relationship built with the organization itself.

Perhaps this first-hand experience may only be seen as critical when a university is looking to overcome a negative reputation, and this may not be the case for a university with a more favorable reputation. It would be interesting to see in the application of the scale within a different type of university. After the factor analysis, there were six remaining items on the pilot

study dealing with the influence of first-hand experience, which demonstrates its importance to remain a part of the scale for assessing university reputation.

The second most common influence students perceived on a university's reputation was the university's size. While most participants were initially referring to the size of the university as a whole, several other participants mentioned the important influence classroom size served to a university's reputation. This suggests that students want to feel like they are noticed, and they are a part of something bigger than themselves rather than just being a number at a larger institution. The quantitative phase found that the item relating to the university's size fell under the behavioral restrictions factor. Moreover, students may feel a sense of restriction in what they can or cannot do depending on the size of the university. Students at a larger university may feel they can get away with more unfavorable behaviors because they will blend in with the crowd, whereas students at a smaller university feel their behaviors are more noticeable, which makes them feel more restricted. Although other variables, such as tuition rates and the location of the university's campus, were not consistently mentioned in the study, the researcher believes these variables may also have an influence on a university's reputation and should be further investigated.

Similarly, students identified school spirit as another critical influential factor on the university's reputation. Students believed others may perceive a lack of school spirit in their university as a general lack of caring towards their academic careers. The participants insinuated that the energy that is driven through the school spirit of the university has to be directed towards a respected event, team, or organization. One avenue the students brought up to channel this spirited energy towards was the athletic teams of the university. One participant stated, "It's like

when you're supporting something, you're doing it as a whole" (R3- Focus group 3). This finding supports one of the three themes Lange, Lee, and Dai (2011) argued for in regards to reputation, which was being known for something. The students want their university to be known for something. This theme also aligns with the six items from the pilot survey that proved to be strongly related to the theme of a sense of unity or togetherness.

Furthermore, participants in phase one commonly identified the university's president as a large influence on the university's reputation. Students identified that the lack of an interaction between the university's leaders and students and the general power distance between the two groups ultimately lead to a lack of support on behalf of the students. This result in a university context is consistent with Yang's (2007) findings that positive organization-public relational outcomes have a significant positive relationship with a favorable reputation. Similarly, the negative organizational relationships at the university studied encourage an unfavorable reputation.

It is a cyclical trend that the students identified. The administration does not relate to the students, therefore, the students disengage, which drives the gap between the administration and students even more. This results in long-term detrimental reputational effects for the university, especially since students identify the importance of having a healthy and open relationship between the university's administration, faculty, staff, and students. The previous influences the students identified under the sense of unity category in the qualitative phase were grouped together in the first-hand experience category for the quantitative scale.

The fifth influence the students identified was the visible outcomes that can be attributed to students who attended the university. These visible outcomes may include grade point average

or graduation rate, but most importantly students believe the success of alumni have a huge influence on the university's reputation. The influence of alumni was consistently brought up by numerous participants across all three of the focus groups. Participants believed successful alumni need to be showcased and promoted while being associated with the university. This demonstrates the importance of hosting successful alumni speakers at events such as Communication Week at the university. They also believed that alumni who speak negatively about their alma mater serve as the greatest negative influence on the university's reputation. Again, this links back into the variable of firsthand experience that the students identified because alumni are seen as more credible by those who may not have any sort of experience with the university. The visible outcomes theme that dominated in the focus groups was not as important of a factor in the assessment of the proposed pilot study.

The sixth influential variable that developed from the qualitative phase was the idea that a university's reputation is dependent upon how it stands in comparison to surrounding universities such as Virginia Tech, James Madison University, and George Mason. A common area of comparison fell on athletic teams, especially with a nearby university such as Virginia Tech having such a well-known football program. In terms of comparison, students also brought up the concept of university ranking systems, which is essentially how a university compares to other institutions. Five items were proposed for the scale revolving around this theme on visible outcomes, and two of the five items initially proposed for this category were eliminated due to a low factor loading. However, the factor analysis revealed that most of those items had a better fit with the category of positive representatives of the university. This could be a result of the theme from the qualitative phase being based more on its breadth rather than its depth. In other words,

it was mentioned multiple times by multiple participants, but it was not discussed in detail during the times the participants brought the topic up.

The seventh and final influential variable developing from the qualitative phase was the theme of the health and safety rules and regulations the university imposes on its students. One participant commented, “It’s kind of like when you’re a little kid, and your parents tell you no. You’re going to do the exact opposite” (R5- Focus group 2). From a strictly communication standpoint, the most interesting thing the participants brought up was the belief that the more strict the university got on its alcohol policies, the more attention the university received from the media. The students seemed to believe that when the university increases its strictness and enforcement of its policies, this leads to more violations being officially recorded.

Moreover, these official violations are something that the media can report through statistics, and this is, again, something that may be linked to the theme of comparison to other universities. If University A is stricter in enforcing its policies, it will have more violations because it is following official procedures. If University B is less strict in enforcing its policies, it may still have the same exact behaviors that are occurring at University A. However, the behaviors at University B are not reflected on negatively because they are not seen as violations and not brought to anyone’s direct attention, especially the media’s.

The perception the students held of the university’s reputation in the media is relatable to McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) idea of agenda-setting with mass media outlets. Agenda setting occurs when the mass media viewers not only learn about an issue, but they learn the level of importance they should be placing on the issue. For universities, this agenda setting may occur when mass media outlets report the statistics of the violations the university recently had. Again,

the students believe the stricter a university is, the more violations will occur, and this will result in an inaccurate quantitative representation of the university that the media will report to its audiences. This demonstrates that there needs to be a balance in determining behaviors of students that should be punished and the behaviors of students that are over punished. The qualitative phase indicated students believe this type of over punishment leads to the creation of a nonexistent problem, and consequently leads to a negative impact of the university's overall reputation.

In the quantitative phase, the items focusing more specifically on the students' behavioral health were categorized under the external perceptions factor, and the items focusing on the strictness of the university were categorized under the behavioral restrictions factor. While health and restrictions were mentioned together in the qualitative phase, they appear to be separate foci in the quantitative phase. One item on the proposed scale that dealt solely with the safe behaviors of the university's students was eliminated due to a low factor loading, while two items focusing primarily on the influence of the strictness of the university had a relatively strong factor loading.

Beneficial public relations tactics. Even with the qualitative phase findings showing that students perceive that their university's reputation is defined in a negative way, the students wanted to provide suggestions that could help to improve the reputation. Students are going to be one group of stakeholders who are motivated to improve the reputation of their university mostly because they understand the value their degree may serve in getting them into a professional career position. They also understand the devaluation that may occur as a result of a negative reputation against their alma mater.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that advertising (i.e. billboards, television, radio commercials, etc.) is not the route to take in an attempt to improve the university's reputation. Instead, the participants agreed that public relations tactics (i.e. special events featuring alumni, social media outlets) should be used to help develop healthy relationships with those who may not have direct experience with the university. This idea brought forth by the students in regards to reputation improvement links back to the idea that students believe a sense of unity must not only exist within the primary publics of the university such as between its administration, faculty, and students, but it must exist between the internal publics and external publics. There must be a common connecting factor presented between those two publics for a healthy reputation to exist.

The qualitative phase also found that this type of relationship development must begin within the internal publics before it can be extended to external publics. The university must be unified as an organization prior to becoming unified with other publics or other organizations. Students felt strongly that something even as simple as interpersonal interaction between the university's administrators, such as the president, would lead to a significant improvement of the reputation. Furthermore, the students believed this interpersonal interaction does not necessarily have to come from those holding the highest administrative positions; instead, they implied the same effect would come from anyone holding some sort of authority position at the university.

The qualitative phase found support for this particular finding in the focus groups as two of the groupings of items after the analysis fell under the sense of unity and first-hand experience factors.

Influence of the university in the media. While it was not a dominant topic of conversation during the focus groups, the qualitative phase of this study found significance in that students believe an overall presence and a sense of urgency by official university's representatives in the media is a critical component of overcoming a negative reputation or maintaining a positive reputation. The participants believed it was critical for the people communicating through media channels, whether it be with local news stations or social media outlets, need to be conducted by officials designated specifically to do so by the university. This is not something the students feel they would be able to combat alone.

None of the items in the pilot survey directly focused on the representation of the university in the media, and this is something that needs to be reevaluated in the revision of the scale. Since the portrayal of the university in the media was not a dominant theme in the qualitative data, items pertaining to this topic were not included in the pilot study; however, future research may want to investigate if it may serve as an influence on a university's overall reputation.

Influence of university reputation on student's level of trust. A primary finding from the focus groups was that students are impacted by the views that others hold about their university. This aligns with Chun's (2005) definition of corporate reputation as the perceptions of both the internal and external stakeholders as well as the interaction that occurs between these stakeholders. Based on the definition provided by Morgan and Hunt (1994) that trust has been observed as a result of the level of confidence that one party holds for the other party's integrity and reliability, the results of the qualitative phase of this study indicate the interaction, that Chun

(2005) suggested, occurs between internal and external stakeholders in a corporation also occurs in a university setting in the form of trust.

For this university specifically, the qualitative phase found the interaction between the differences of perceptions among students and others results in a decrease in the level of trust students held for the quality of education they would receive from the university. As previously mentioned in the results of the qualitative phase, after hearing negative comments from others about the university, one participant said, “It made me a little...nervous about coming down here” (R7- Focus group 1). The nervousness this student experienced after hearing those negative comments was probably a result of a reduction of certainty in the perception of the university’s competence, which Hon and Grunig (1999) defined as the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do. They also outlined the competence component as a dimension of trust.

Furthermore, the results of the qualitative phase of this research corresponds with the model that Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt (2002) proposed, which outlines the relationships between reputation, trust, and reciprocity within e-Businesses. The qualitative results only support the first phase of this model’s application within a university setting, and further research should be conducted to determine the influence of the trust that develops from a university’s reputation on the reciprocating actions of the university’s stakeholders.

Perhaps students would be more willing to give back, recruit new students, or defend their university when negative comments are made about their university. This model helps to explain the process that occurs when dealing with a university that is perceived to have a negative reputation as viewed by outsiders. A negative reputation leads to a diminishment in

trust, which ultimately leads to no action on behalf of the students or unfavorable actions towards the university such as potential students not initially enrolling, current students transferring to another university or engaging in negative word-of-mouth about the university.

The participants also mentioned that ranking systems influence how capable they believe the university is to fulfill its mission. These rankings indicate there is some sort of standard upheld within the academic program, and there is a third party monitoring these standards.

The results from the quantitative phase indicate the importance of the trust variable may not be as important as originally thought. The two items focusing on trust (“Meeting successful alumni from RU makes me more confident in the education I am receiving” and “Hearing negative comments about the university makes me think I am not getting as good of an education as students at other universities”) were split into the factors of positive representatives of the university and external perceptions during the analysis.

The idea of trust and its role in conjunction with university reputation may not have been as large of a finding as expected. This is primarily because the researcher discontinued the use of the guiding question that used the two concepts together after the first focus group. The researcher felt the question was too leading and resulted in biased responses, therefore, specific questions were not asked in regards to trust and reputation. This most likely impacted the concept of trust arising as a dominant theme. Future researchers may want to investigate the interrelatedness of these two concepts in future studies, especially while keeping Mui, Mohtashemi, and Halberstadt’s (2002) model in mind.

Limitations of the study. The monetary, geographic, and time restrictions placed on this study lead the researcher to use a convenience sample of students currently enrolled at the

university. This limited the collection of data to only one university, and in this case, the university's students just happened to perceive it as having a negative reputation. This may have eliminated or prevented discussion of the factors students perceive as influencing a university with a positive reputation. The time constraints further limited the researcher's ability to refine the pilot survey based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis; therefore, the quantitative results of this study are only purposeful for the scale development and refinement rather than serving as a tool for generalizing data to larger university populations.

Another limitation of this study was that responses in both the qualitative and quantitative phases were only collected to assess perceptions towards university reputation from one group of stakeholders, current students. In future research, data can include the perceptions of university faculty members, family members, alumni, employers, community members, etc. Furthermore, the development of this preliminary scale was only based off of the current students from a small public university, and the outcomes may change when other types of higher educational institutions are included such as community colleges, small private universities, large private universities, and large public universities.

The researcher also ran across limitations with the collection of data in the quantitative phase. Due to the use of a convenience sample, there may have been a few cases where some participants took the survey twice because two different professors in separate courses offered extra credit for his or her participation. The researcher attempted to identify all of these cases and delete the duplicate entries. There is no evidence that the participants were intentionally messing with the data, and no cases were identified with all of the exact same responses, so this is not a large limitation of the study.

Implications for future research. With the exploratory nature of this research in such an understudied area, more subsequent research must be conducted to further develop and refine the scale to ensure all potential aspects of university reputation are covered. One aspect that particularly needs more attention is the opinion based items from the pilot survey. One factor that was derived from the exploratory factor analysis of the opinion items included a lot of general statements that may need to be further differentiated. Future research must be conducted prior to the finalization of the scale, which would lead to researchers being able to assess the perceptions of different stakeholders and to make generalizations as far as what communication or public relations efforts they should be engaging in based on what their stakeholders perceive as most important.

Future research studies may also want to break down the participant sample into higher achieving students and lower achieving students. Generally, higher achieving students place more emphasis on and understand the importance of attending a particular university. It would be interesting to see if reputation may play a larger influence on these students versus the lower achieving students. Future research studies should also be conducted at universities that are not similar to this university to ensure the consistency of the reputational variables. Universities that have larger athletic programs or are more specialized in their academic programs may conclude different influencing variables on a university's reputation.

Conclusions. A critical function of public relations is to develop mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and a public. In order for this to happen, the organization must be positively viewed by its stakeholders. In other words, the organization must have a

favorable reputation. This is becoming more important for organizations, especially higher education institutions as the marketing and competition in the industry increases.

The participants of phase one in this study identified five major contributors to the university's reputation. The participants saw the external perceptions held by outsiders as an influence on the university's reputation. They also believed a sense of unity among its students and between the students and administration contributed to the university's overall reputation. Thirdly, they believed its reputation was influenced by the visible outcomes that are demonstrated by being associated with the university. Finally, the participants believed how the university compared to other institutions as well as the health and safety of the institution were additional contributing factors to the university's reputation.

The pilot study in phase two of this study found a sense of unity, first-hand experience, positive representatives of the university, external perceptions, behavioral restrictions, strong relationships, and safety as significant factors in the university's reputation.

From these studies, it appears that external perceptions, a sense of unity among the university's members, visible outcomes, and the health and safety behavioral restrictions are large influencing factors to a university's overall reputation. The identification of these influences to the university's reputation will help public relations practitioners at the university, and possibly other universities, to develop communication plans that will focus on the university's reputation. This will allow healthier and more productive relationships to be developed between members and nonmembers, which will provide the longest-term benefit to the university and will ensure it remains in existence.

References

- Aula, P. (2010). Social media, reputation risk and ambient publicity management. *Strategy and Leadership*, 38(6), 43-49, 43-49. doi:10.1108/10878571011088069
- Barnett, M. L., Jermier, J. M., & Lafferty, B. A. (2006). Corporate reputation: The definitional landscape. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 9(1), 26-38.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550012>
- Brenner, J. (2013, February 14). *Pew internet: Social networking (full detail)*. Retrieved January 5, 2013 from Pew Internet: <http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/March/Pew-Internet-Social-Networking-full-detail.aspx>
- Bromley, D. B. (2000). Psychological aspects of corporate identity, image and reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 3(3), 240-252.
- Cattell, R. B. (1966). The scree test for the number of factors, multivariate behavioral research. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 1(2), 245-276.
- Caudron, S. (1997). Forget image: It's your reputation that matters. *Industry Week*, 246(3), 13-16.
- Chun, R. (2005). Corporate reputation: Meaning and measurement. *International Journal of Management Review*, 7(2), 91-109.
- Conard, M. J., & Conard, M. A. (2000). An analysis of academic reputation as perceived by consumers of higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9(4), 69-80.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-176.

- Cravens, K., Oliver, E. G., Ramamoorti, S. (2003). The reputation index: Measuring and managing corporate reputation. *European Management Journal*, 21(2), 201-212.
doi:10.1016/S0263-2373(03)00015-X
- Dasgupta, P. (1988). Trust as a commodity. In D. G. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust*. (pp. 49-72). New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Davies, G., Chun, R., Vinhas da Silva, R., & Roper, S. (2004). A corporate character scale to assess employee and customer views of organization reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 7(2), 125-146.
- Deephouse, D. L. (2000). Media reputation as a strategic resource: An integration of mass communication and resource-based theories. *Journal of Management*, 26(6), 1091-1112.
- Dolphin, R. R. (2004). Corporate reputation- A value creating strategy. *Corporate Governance*, 4(3), 77-92. doi:10.1108/14720700410547521
- Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2), 239-263.
- eBay. (2013). *All about feedback*. Retrieved January 15, 2013 from <http://pages.ebay.com/help/feedback/allaboutfeedback.html>
- Edmunds, H. (1999). *The focus group research handbook*. Chicago, IL: NTC Business Books.
- Fombrun, C. J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Fombrun, C. J., Gardberg, N. A., & Sever, J. M. (2000). The reputation quotientSM: A multi-stakeholder measure of corporate reputation. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 7(4), 241-255.

- Gillham, B. (2000). *The research interview*. London: Continuum.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Glenn, D. (2011). The default major: Skating through B-school. *The New York Times*, pp. ED16.
- Greenbaum, T. L. (1988). *The Practical handbook and guide to focus group research*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Guilford, J. P. (1954). *Psychometric methods* (2nd Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hair, J. F., Tatham, R.L., Anderson, R. E., & Black, W. (1998). *Multivariate data analysis*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Hon, L. C., & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Gainesville, FL: Institution for Public Relations.
- Huang, Y. (2001). OPRA: A cross-cultural, multiple-item scale for measuring organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(1), 61-90.
- Hutton, J. G., Goodman, M. B., Alexander, J. B., Genest, C. M. (2001). Reputation management: The new face of corporate public relations? *Public Relations Review*, 27, 247-261.
- Josang, A., Ismail, R., Boyd, C. (2007). A survey of trust and reputation systems for online service provision. *Decision Support Systems*, 43(2), 618-644.
- Kazoleas, D. Kim, Y., & Moffitt, M. A. (2001) Institutional image: A case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 6(4), 205-216.
- Keh, H. T, & Xie, Y. (2009). Corporate reputation and customer behavioral intentions: The roles of trust, identification and commitment. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 38, 732-742.

- Kidd, P. S., & Parshall, M. B. (2000). Getting the focus and the group: Enhancing analytical rigor in focus group research. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(3), 293-308.
- Kim, Y. (2001). Measuring the economic value of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 13*(1), 3-26.
- Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: Introducing focus groups. *BMJ, 311*, 299-302.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lange, D., Lee, P. M., & Dai, Y. (2011). Organizational reputation: A review. *Journal of Management, 37*(1), 153-184.
- Litosseliti, L. (2003). *Using focus groups in research*. London: Continuum.
- Mangan, J., Lalwani, C., & Gardner, B. (2004). Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies in logistics research. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, 34*(7), 565-578. doi:10.1108/09600030410552258
- Marken, G. A. (1990). Corporate image—We all have one, but few work to protect and project it. *Public Relations Quarterly, 21*-23.
- Money, K., & Hillenbrand, C. (2006). Using reputation measurement to create value: An analysis and integration of existing measures. *Journal of General Management, 32*(1), 1-12.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 58*, 20-38.

- Mui, L., Mohtashemi, M., & Halberstadt, A. (2002). *A computational model of trust and reputation*. Proceedings of the 35th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Waikoloa, HI.
- Page, G., & Fearn, H. (2005). Corporate reputation: What do consumers really care about? *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(3), 305-313. doi:10.1017/S0021849905050361
- Pfarrer, M. D., Pollock, T. G., & Rindova, V. P. (2010). A tale of two assets: The effects of firm reputation and celebrity on earnings surprises and investors' reactions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(5), 1131-1152.
- Rampell, C. (2012, March 2). Why tuition has skyrocketed at state schools. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/why-tuition-has-skyrocketed-at-state-schools/>
- Saxton, M. K. (1998). Where do reputations come from? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 1(4), 393-399.
- Schwaiger, M. (2004). Components and parameters of corporate reputation—An empirical study. *Schmalenbach Business Review*, 56, 46-71.
- Shaw, D. L., & McCombs, M. E. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187. doi:10.1177/107769909206900410
- Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. (2009). *American capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state, and higher education*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. 1990. Focus groups: Theory and practice. (Look up APA citation for book in a series)
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory

- procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sung, M., & Yang, S. (2008). Toward the model of university image: The influence of brand personality, external prestige, and reputation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20(4), 357-376. doi:10.1080/10627260802153207
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Theus, K. T. (1993). Academic reputations: The process of formation and decay. *Public Relations Review*, 19(3), 277-291.
- Times Higher Education. (2012). Reputation to consider? Check the league tables. Retrieved from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2011-2012/analysis-reputation-consider.html>
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011* (NCES 2012-001).
- Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., & Melanithiou, Y. (2007). A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(9), 979-989. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.01.023
- Walsh, G., & Beatty, S. E. (2007). Customer-based corporate reputation of a service firm: Scale development and validation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(1), 127-143. doi:10.1007/s11747-007-0015-7
- Wartick, S. L. (2002). Measuring corporate reputation: Definition and data. *Business & Society*, 41(4), 371-392. doi:10.1177/0007650302238774

- Yang, S. (2007). An integrated model for organization-public relational outcomes, organizational reputation, and their antecedents. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 19*(2), 91-121.
- Yang, S., Alessandri, S. W., & Kinsey, D. F. (2008). An integrative analysis of reputation and relational quality: A study of university-student relationships. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 18*(2), 145-170.