

DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR:
HOW ARE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES INTERACTING ON THE WEB?

By

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by

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Dedicated to the memory of Jane Hutcherson

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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This study provides an exploratory prescription for building more effective Web sites by examining the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web for the nonprofit sector. This study explored the public relations and communications implications of the extent to which dialogic characteristics are used on the Web sites of colleges and universities, the extent to which the characteristics of online giving are utilized as a form of interaction, and with which publics these organizations are seeking to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web site. The study included the completion of a content analysis of 128 college and university Web sites represented in the Philanthropy 400.

This study found that colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400 had significant room for improvement in incorporating dialogic characteristics on their Web sites. The college and university Web sites performed the best on integrating ease of interface characteristics and the characteristics of usefulness of information for both alumni and donor publics. However, the sites performed the worst on incorporating a

dialogic loop for both alumni and donor publics and characteristics to generate return visits. The colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 appear to be utilizing their Web sites as more of an information resource. These organizations are providing a Web site that is easy to use with information targeted to its diverse publics. Nevertheless, colleges and universities are underutilizing their Web sites for feedback and interactive opportunities with their publics.

This study also found that there was widespread integration of online giving; however, there was room for significant improvement in incorporating useful tools such as frequently asked questions, highlighting the security of online giving and providing clearly identified contact information. Colleges and universities are indeed utilizing online giving as a communication tool to encourage interactivity and drive donations, but within this process they are lacking in key features that encourage dialogue.

Lastly, this study found that colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400 are utilizing their Web sites to target diverse publics and engage them in dialogue. Most frequently, the sites targeted media, alumni and students. By targeting publics on the Home page, colleges and universities can encourage dialogue, interact with these publics, and facilitate ease of use in finding information.

There are three primary contributions of this study to the field of public relations. This is the first study of its kind that focused specifically on nonprofit organizations to determine how these organizations are building and maintaining relationships through their Web sites. Secondly, this is the first study of its kind that has examined online giving as a form of interaction, a characteristic of a dialogic loop with donor publics. Lastly, this study determined with which publics these nonprofit organizations are seeking to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web site.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the United States alone, an estimated 135 million people actively used the Internet during the month of September 2004, and Nielsen estimates that the current digital media universe in the U.S. is more than 200 million people (Nielsen/NetRatings, 2004). “As the world’s largest information source, the Internet provides the public relations industry with an exciting communication medium offering unlimited message dissemination potential” (Wright, 2001, p. 2).

The Web offers nonprofit organizations a communication tool to reach numerous publics: the media, donors and volunteers, potential donors and volunteers, corporate partners, potential granting agencies, and more. “With the arrival of the WWW . . . local NPOs now have the opportunity to take their message global with same level of funding [as other organizations]” (Elliott, Katsioloudes, & Weldon, 1998, p. 300). But, the question is, are nonprofits taking their message global and using the Internet and their Web sites to the full extent this communication tool provides?

A handful of articles have been published on how to build effective Web sites for nonprofits and how to utilize technology in nonprofit efforts (Greene, 2001; Making Web Sites, 2004; Wallace, 2001a; Wallace, 2004a; Wallace, 2004c). There have even been findings that more nonprofit organizations, specifically foundations, are producing online annual reports, rather than printed publications (Kerkman, 2003). However, most research focusing on the Web as a communication tool for nonprofits explores current efforts by organizations with a case study approach (Greene, 2001), or a simple reporting

mechanism, such as, what NPOs are doing on the Web (Nonprofit Organizations and Using Technology, 2001).

Online giving is a Web-based tool that is unique to nonprofit organizations. Online giving offers opportunities for interactivity, including the ability to secure donations as well as to assist in the relationship-building process between organizations and publics. While there have been several surveys (Austin, 2001; Larose, 2003; Wallace, 2001b; Wallace, 2002; Wallace, 2003; Wallace, 2004b) reporting the dollar totals for online donations, online giving has not been explored as a relationship-building tool on NPO Web sites either.

Public relations research about the Internet falls into two categories: attitudes and expectations about the Web as an organizational tool, and Web site design characteristics for providing information to publics (Kent et al, 2003, p. 64). Several researchers have analyzed the content provided on corporate Web sites, exploring media relations, targeted publics, and corporate representation of social responsibility (Callison, 2003; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Esrock & Leichty, 2000). Other researchers have studied how public relations practitioners perceive Web sites as communications tools, (Hill & White, 2000; Johnson, 1997) and how the Internet is changing and further shaping the role of public relations practitioners (Porter & Sallot, 2003). Naude and Shim took an international perspective in analyzing the World Wide Web's use as a public relations tool in two separate studies. Naude et al (2004) examined how non-governmental organizations in South Africa are using the Web, while Shim (2002) explored Korean practitioners' perceptions of Web sites as a communication tool.

However, only in the last five to six years has the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web begun showing up in public relations research. Kent and Taylor in 1998; Kent, Taylor and White in 2001; and Taylor, Kent and White again in 2003 appear to be the most-widely published on the subject. Their studies focus on using dialogic communication to build relationships between organizations and publics through the use of Web sites. In 1998 they detailed the theoretical framework to “facilitate relationship building with publics through the World Wide Web” (p. 321). Kent and Taylor detailed five principles as guidelines for the “successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web” (p. 327-334). These five principles include: a dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness of the interface, and conservation of visitors (p. 327-334).

Importantly, there has been very little research, if any, specifically on nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that explores how these organizations are building and maintaining relationships through their Web sites. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship-building use of the World Wide Web by one type of nonprofit organization, colleges and universities. The study’s goal is to examine the use of Web sites by colleges and universities to determine the extent to which they use effective dialogue to build organization-public relationships. This study will provide quantitative data that examines the dialogic characteristics of Webbed communication that colleges and universities are using to target specific publics, and how they are utilizing online giving, a characteristic unique to nonprofits. To this researcher’s knowledge, a study of this kind, which focuses solely on the nonprofit sector, has not been attempted.

This study will attempt to fill a gap in public relations and nonprofit literature to determine what types of relationships are being targeted through the use of nonprofit organizational Web site and how these nonprofits are using dialogic communication in building these relationships. This study will attempt to provide an exploratory prescription for building more effective Web sites by examining the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web for the nonprofit sector. The results of the study have the potential to influence both theory development in dialogic communication and public relations practice by exploring the use of dialogic communication and the relationship-building function of nonprofit Web sites.

The goals of this study are given context and definition in the second chapter of this paper as reviews of previous literature concerning the Internet as a public relations medium, relationship-building, dialogic communication, and nonprofit organizations and the Internet are examined, and three research questions are presented. The methodology for measuring dialogic communication, targeted publics and online giving features is provided in the third chapter, and chapter four describes the results obtained by a content analysis of the data. Chapter five discusses the results and implications of the study, and finally, Chapter six presents a summary of the study's contributions, limitations, and opportunities for future research, as well as suggests the significance of the study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored the characteristics of dialogic communication that nonprofit educational organizations use to build relationships through their Web sites. The primary purpose of this study was to analyze dialogic communication by conducting a content analysis of the Web sites of the 129 colleges and universities represented in the *Philanthropy 400*. The review of the literature is organized into four major subsections: the Internet as a Public Relations Medium, Relationship Building on the Internet, Dialogic Communication on the Internet, and Nonprofit Organizations and the Internet. It is important to note that the majority of the literature in this review was published between 1999 and 2003, which further reinforces the importance of this study in examining the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web as a public relations tool.

“The Internet represents the most ubiquitous leading edge of what is a major communication revolution” (Wright, 2001, p. 6). In the United States alone, an estimated 135 million people actively used the Internet during the month of September 2004, and Nielsen estimates that the current digital media universe in the U.S. is more than 200 million people (Nielsen/NetRatings, 2004). “As the world’s largest information source, the Internet provides the public relations industry with an exciting communication medium offering unlimited message dissemination potential” (Wright, 2001, p. 2).

The Internet as a Public Relations Medium

The Internet provides stakeholders and information seekers direct access to organizational messages. As a public relations mass medium, the Internet enables the content of a message to reach a mass audience, provides direct and immediate access to specific target audiences, and allows communication to be managed directly between the organization and its audiences (Hill & White, 2000; White & Raman, 1999; Wright, 2001). Unlike more traditional media forms such as television and newspapers, the main advantage of the Internet is it is not monitored by a gatekeeper (Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Hill & White, 2000; White & Raman, 1999; Wright, 2001). Organizations can communicate messages directly to their publics and stakeholders through their Web sites without interference in message dissemination from the media or any third party gatekeeper. “The ability to bypass the traditional media gatekeepers is the reason the Internet has been hailed as a defacto rival to the news media” (Coombs, 1998, p. 297).

The World Wide Web is indeed a powerful communication tool that impacts the efforts of marketing, advertising and public relations. This electronic medium offers increased opportunities to attract, persuade, and motivate targeted publics. Media and investor relations are regularly supported through organizational Web sites (Heath, 1998, p. 273). In addition, “The Internet has become a major venue for emerging issues because it is a communication vehicle used by persons who are issues oriented” (p. 274).

Practitioners are utilizing the Web for issues management as well as to reach diverse publics. “Practitioners can either go directly to their publics, bypassing traditional media by monitoring and targeting communities that spring up overnight online around important issues, or they can place news stories on appropriate niche sites visited by the

publics they want to influence” (Porter & Sallot, 2003, p. 613). In a survey of PRSA and IPRA members, Wright (2001) found that the Internet has enabled public relations professionals to communicate with more targeted audiences and more media, however the study suggests that practitioners feel these new technologies have not yet been used to their full potential (p. 9).

The increased interaction between parties that the Web offers is by far one of the medium’s most prominent advantages. As Cutlip, Center and Broom point out, successful public relations professionals have been matching appropriate media with suitable messages since public relations began (as cited in Wright, 2001, p. 6). So as public relations practitioners evaluate and utilize the World Wide Web as part of their strategic communication process, the Web offers four primary benefits to increased interaction with the public (Cooley, 1999, p. 41):

1. Image improvement
2. Ease in collecting and analyzing public opinion
3. Agenda setting to reflect the needs of the public
4. Increased accountability.

Public relations practitioners are at the heart, the center, of the interactivity on an organizational Web site. The first step in creating an interactive environment on a Web site is to provide information on investor relations, corporate programs and policies, community involvement, and employee relations. “The Web site will then open the door to public participation and discussion” (Cooley, 1999, p. 41-42). In addition, Cooley advocates adding a forum for comments and suggestions, modeled after a chat room, including topics relevant to the company.

The role of the public relations practitioner is an “important element of a public forum” to serve as the central monitor, initiating discussion, persuading visitors to

participate, and monitoring messages (p. 41). The role of a central monitor takes many forms: providing information on matters of public interest; listening and responding to legitimate concerns and/or questions; providing a space for interaction on issues of public interest; protecting the privacy of discussion participants; and utilizing public opinion to shape corporate programs and policies (p. 41-42).

If the organizational Web site is a component of the strategic communication process, one would assume that it was created with public relations goals to achieve. However, in 22 interviews with Web decision makers (WDMs), White and Raman (1999) found that only one Web site decision-maker said their organization's Web site was created for public relations, while the most often cited purposes were to provide information, for advertising and marketing, and for customer communication and feedback (e-mail) (p. 409). In addition, it appears that there was little of the public relations process even involved in implementing these Web sites. In fact, "in many cases, Web site planning is done by trial and error based on subjective knowledge and intuition, with little or no formal research and evaluation" (White & Ramand, 1999, p. 405). The content of these Web sites consisted of written or printed material from brochures, advertising, and/or existing annual and quarterly reports that were readily available. "Most respondents could identify the target publics of their organization, but admitted they had no way of knowing if they were reaching their audience through their Web site" (p. 410). While organizations recognized an urgency to create a Web site, in their "haste to take advantage of the Web and to establish an Internet presence, the basic tenets of public relations research, planning, and evaluation are often ignored" (White & Ramand, 1999, p. 415). In order for organizations to realize the full potential of the World Wide

Web in reaching communication and organizational goals, the public relations function should be at the heart of the design, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of the organization's Web site.

PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Internet

The Internet is a communication tool for public relations professionals to utilize, and therefore, practitioners' perceptions of the Internet and the World Wide Web are important to the organization's successful use of this medium. One consistent theme in a qualitative study, which focused on practitioners' perceptions of new technology and involved 17 in-depth interviews, was "how audience-centered the practitioners were in the employment of new technologies" (Johnson, 1997, p. 223). Public relations practitioners' most prominent reason for choosing strategies that involved new technologies, including computer-mediated communication, the World Wide Web, and e-mail messages and forums was the ability to reach a particular audience (Johnson, 1997, p. 223-225). "Practitioners recognized the usefulness of interactive media, but categorized it as another option, best for certain uses, rather than a substitute for something they did before. They were careful to differentiate it from face-to-face communication, along with traditional one-way media" (p. 231).

While in Hill and White's (2000) interviews with 13 practitioners, three dominant findings prevailed: the Web site's low priority in the public relations mix; anticipated value of the Web site; and the juggling act that practitioners were performing to manage the Web site. The Web site was a low priority for both the public relations practitioner and the organization, often called a "B list" task (p. 37). Practitioners and organizations anticipated that the Web site would add value to their public relations strategies through demonstrated competitiveness, supplementing media relations activities, reaching new

audiences, relationship building and developing marketable skills, but had yet to see any immediate results (p. 39). While the juggling act, considered issues that influenced how well a practitioner manages a Web site as a public relations responsibility, including skepticism about the value of the Web site, lack of evaluation of the Web as a public relations medium, and inability to keep the site up-to-date with current resources (p. 40-42).

It is clear that the Internet has great potential as a communication tool with benefits such as the ability to target and reach diverse publics, the opportunity for increased interaction with targeted publics, and the means for direct message dissemination. However, practitioners' perceptions, limited resources and time, and the absence of the public relations process in the Web's use as a communication tool, hinder its ability to be successfully integrated into the organization's strategic communication plan. Nonetheless, without public relations and organizational professionals who are committed to devoting the time and resources needed, the World Wide Web will just be another tool in the toolbox, and never utilized to its full potential (Hill & White, 2003, p. 43).

Relationship Building on the Internet

Public relations is defined as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 6). At the heart of public relations is building relationships, and likewise, the World Wide Web is a communication tool for public relations practitioners to utilize in building and maintaining relationships. Only in the last five to six years has the discussion of the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web begun permeating public relations

research. Several studies have focused on the role of the corporate Web site. These studies have examined relationship building through corporate Web sites with a focus on relationship maintenance (Ki, 2004), social responsibility (Esrock & Leichty, 1998), targeted publics (Esrock & Leichty, 2000), and the media (Callison, 2000; Esrock & Leichty, 1999). Research on Internet relationship-building also has covered topics with an international focus (Naude, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004; Shim, 2002), electronic relationships through the marketing lens (Motion, 2000), and relationships with voters through presidential candidates Web sites (McKeown & Plowman, 1999).

Corporate Relationship Building on the Web

Esrock and Leichty have in three separate studies examined corporate Web sites to determine how they use the Web to present corporate social responsibility issues (1998), to provide information to the media (1999), and to establish which publics are targeted by these sites (2000), while Callison (2003) also examined the use of the corporate Web site as a media relations tool. Research on the use of Web sites for relationship building has utilized the *Fortune* 500 listing, which ranks the top corporations according to their corporate revenues and financial performance.

Advantages

Esrock and Leichty (1998) identified several key features that distinguish the World Wide Web as an effective public relations medium in the corporate sector. The audiences the Web serve tend to be more active in seeking out and processing information than the publics who are targeted via traditional mass media. Messages on the Web are also unencumbered by temporal restrictions or media gatekeepers (p. 304-305). "Hence, WWW pages offer corporations an opportunity to participate in 'setting the agenda' on public policy issues. Web pages can also employ interactive features to

collect information, monitor public opinion on issues, and proactively engage citizens in direct dialogue about a variety of matters” (p. 306). They stressed the ability of the Web to provide timely information to various publics with the “potential to increase the velocity of the public relations process” (p. 309).

One practitioner characterized this process as consisting of three separate elements. “It’s three things: speed, speed, speed. Speed of dissemination, speed of access, and speed of feedback.” Because of these factors, the era of new communications technologies has been characterized as the era of “the end of organizational secrets.” (p. 309)

Image building

In addition, when it comes to organizational self-presentation, the Web serves as an image building tool (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). When the Web is used to “disseminate information about a corporation’s good citizenship activities, the medium becomes the embodiment of an image building approach to social responsibility” (Esrock & Leichty, 1998, p. 309).

In their study, a large majority (82%) of corporations used their Web page to promote some aspect of their adherence to corporate social responsibility standards, “suggesting that image building via the Internet has become an accepted public relations practice” (p. 313). However, few companies used their Web sites as a research and communication tool to proactively correspond with publics, and even fewer used the medium as a tool to advance their positions on policy issues (p. 314). “The predominant model of corporate Web pages seems to be top-down/information-push communications. At this time relatively few corporate Web pages are designed to facilitate meaningful two-way interaction between organizations and their publics” (p. 317).

Targeted publics

Esrock and Leichty (2000) also investigated the publics targeted on the home page of corporate Web sites, and found the three primary audiences were shareholders/investors (68%), prospective employees (68%), and customers/customer service (51%). Lower priority was given to media (22%), dealers and retailers (8%), and current employees (3%) (p. 334). The content of the typical corporate home page recognizes multiple publics; however, some of these sites “fail to give prominence to navigability features and feedback tools, even though these elements have been identified as a key to building two-way communication with publics” (p. 338). The researchers identified a gap in the design of corporate Web pages between “acknowledging the importance of the concerns of a public and actually engaging that same public interactively. If a corporate site is to serve as a truly interactive tool, e-mail links and navigational features need to be featured on the front Web page” (p. 338).

Media relations

In Esrock and Leichty’s 1999 study of corporate Web sites as a media relations tool, they noted that many journalists have trouble finding what they are looking for on corporate Web sites. Their recommendation was that all press-related material should be put in one place, a press center, to reduce the number of pages that journalists must navigate through, and news releases should be posted by topics and product lines rather than in chronological order (Esrock & Leichty, 1999, p. 458). In addition, the researchers noticed frequent technical problems, which suggest that many corporations have much room for improvement in designing functional and easily accessible Web pages (p. 463).

The majority of corporations (88%) in their *Fortune* 500 sample used online news releases for media relations purposes, and they typically organized a collection of these

releases dating back eighteen months (s.d.=11) (p. 461). However, “despite the widespread inclusion of releases and extensive archiving, only 60% of the Web sites provided the name of media contact personnel for follow-up questions” (p. 461).

Callison (2003) found similar results in his census of the *Fortune* 500: 24.7 percent of the press rooms did not list any contact information, while 57.4 percent listed a practitioner identified by name, 10.8 percent listed a PR staffer in general, and 7.2 percent listed information for the company in general (p. 35). Out of 499 of the *Fortune* 500 Company Web sites, only 39.08 percent had press rooms labeled with names that clearly identified the linked area of the Web site as a media resource, and 62.6 percent of the press rooms were linked to the homepage (p. 34, 36). News releases (96.9%), executive bios/profiles (51.3%), and executive photographs (48.7%) were the most common items present in the news rooms of *Fortune* 500 Company Web sites (p. 36).

“The PR opportunities are clear with journalists reporting that they have less manpower in putting together the news and the majority stating that they have more work to do than ever” (Callison, 2003, p. 29). However, although the use of “press rooms is encouraged, the information included in the press rooms is present in sparse supply... much room for improvement exists” (p. 36).

Relationship maintenance

Lastly, Ki (2003) explored relationship maintenance strategies of *Fortune* 500 corporate Web sites. Ki operationalized five relationship maintenance strategies: positivity, openness or disclosure, sharing of tasks, networking, and access in a content analysis of 286 Web sites. This study found that among the five strategies, company Web sites best performed “openness” items, which consist of company overview, releasing news, annual report and stock price, while “networking” with environmental groups,

union groups, and community groups, was the worst performed and least frequently displayed (Ki, 2003, p. 51). “‘Openness’ was tabulated as information from companies related to finances or organizational restructuring, while ‘networking’ is interaction a company maintains with external groups or organizations that also interact with its publics” (p. 51).

Non-Corporate Relationship-Building Studies

Other research on Internet relationship-building covers topics with an international focus (Naude, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004; Shim, 2002), electronic relationships through the marketing lens (Motion, 2000), and relationships with voters through presidential candidates Web sites (McKeown & Plowman, 1999).

International perspective

Naude, Froneman, and Atwood, as well as Shim took an international perspective in analyzing the World Wide Web’s use as a public relations tool in two separate studies. Naude, Froneman, and Atwood (2004) examined how non-governmental organizations in South Africa are using the Web, while Shim (2002) explored Korean practitioners’ perceptions of Web sites as a communication tool.

Naude, Froneman, and Atwood (2004) found that most of the South African NGOs studied did not view the building of relationships and mutual understanding as the purpose of their public relations efforts. “The poor quality of public relations overall led to an inadequate response to the internet as a means to practice two-way symmetrical communication. Most of the web sites analyzed displayed a lack of interactivity and two-way symmetrical communication principles and Web sites were often used as a mere information dissemination tool or instrument” (Naude, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004, p. 90).

Motion, a marketing professor in New Zealand, (2000) outlined how public relations builds electronic relationships through interactivity, branding, and the public forum with a case study of Nzgirl.co.nz. Motion detailed three dimensions of interactivity that are essential to public relations practice: self-selecting publics, stakeholder participation, and customization (Motion, 2000, p. 22-24). "There is a dynamic nature of relationship management on the Internet, and Web site publics form and reform of their own volition" (p. 23); organizations are no longer the initiators or controllers of the communication relationships (p. 24); and electronic communication can be customized to individual members of key stakeholder groups (p. 24).

Presidential candidates

In a case study of the 1996 Democratic and Republican parties' presidential candidates use of the World Wide Web, which included interviews, review of documentation for the Web site, and direct observation of each Web site, the study found that both candidates were "effective in using their Web sites to avoid mediation" (McKeown & Plowman, 1999, p. 340). Each Web site provided abundant material to review and determine what the campaign stood for, and both candidates supplied numerous position papers on specific issues that they defined as important to communicate to voters (p. 340). "The campaigns were able to present more in-depth issues information through this new communication medium than traditional media channels, but the campaigns did not use this new technology to increase interaction between voters and candidates" (p. 321).

Dialogic Communication and the Internet

Ferguson (1984) predicted that "the area of public relationships offered the best opportunity for theory development in public relations" (p. 32). Organization-public

relationships are being developed on the Web, and this relatively new medium offers uniquely interactive opportunities for dialogue between organizations and publics. In the previous section, the researchers focused on the corporate sector, while Kent, Taylor, and White have focused on activist or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Kent and Taylor (1998), and Kent, Taylor and White (2001; 2003) focus on building dialogic relationships through the Web between organizations and publics.

Kent and Taylor (1998) detailed the theoretical framework to “facilitate relationship building with publics through the World Wide Web” (p. 321) through five principles as guidelines for the “successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web” (p. 327-334). These five principles include: a dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness of the interface, and conservation of visitors (p. 327-334).

History of Dialogue

Over the past forty years, the term dialogue has often appeared in public relations literature, and its origin is often traced back to the values of public relations defined by Sullivan (Lerbinger & Sullivan, 1965). Sullivan imparts that public relations must ensure the rights of individuals: the right to true information and the right to participate, and in so doing, these rights constitute the mutual values of public relations, the mutual benefits of public relations for organizations and publics (in Lerbinger & Sullivan, 1965, p. 412-439). These mutual values embody the epitome of the profession – its higher calling, and Sullivan notes that for public relations to succeed, the profession must be “based on human rights sacred to the person” (p. 437). As the public relations profession strives to represent these mutual values of individual person and organization, Sullivan predicts, “it will be the institutional segment of the profession of human communication” (p. 437).

“Among contemporary existentialist philosophers, Buber is the primary one who places the concept of dialogue at the heart of his view of human communication and existence” (Johannesen, 1990, p. 58). Buber’s characteristics of dialogue include: authenticity, inclusion, confirmation, presentness, spirit of mutual equality, and supportive climate (p. 62-64); whereas, monologic communication is nonpersonal or impersonal, characterized by self-centeredness, deception, pretense, display, appearance, artifice, using, profit, unapproachableness, seduction, domination, exploitation, and manipulation (p. 64). Dialogue is the basis for an ethical relationship (Johannesen, p. 58-64) and in Buber’s definition of dialogue, the parties must view communicating with each other as the goal of the relationship (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 324).

Ethical communication cannot be dominated by one party, and it involves a cooperative, communicative relationship (Habermas, 1981). According to Heath (2000), “Dialogue consists of exchange and challenge... Through dialogue, an expedient relativism can be forged as sides concur and co-create a mutually acceptable view of reality” (p. 44). Also inherent in this dialogue between parties are challenges which include a clash of ideas, shared control between the parties, and willingness by each participant to risk his or her point of view by submitting it for scrutiny (p. 44).

“A strategic approach to public relations would use organizational objectives as a starting point, whereas a communicative approach would assume that objectives would be formed intersubjectively, as part of the communication process (Heath, 2000, p. 132). Arnett argued that “dialogue is honesty in relation to what is called the rhetorical situation”; and Stewart explored the foundations of dialogic communications and traced

its philosophical roots to a common label “relationship” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 324-325; Stewart, 1977).

Dialogue as an Indicator of Symmetrical Communication

The goal of public relations is to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships, and dialogue is a key component of this goal. Dialogue has been considered the most ethical form of public relations and one of the key features of the symmetrical model (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 266). Dialogic communication is the backbone of Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model of public relations, the most desirable model of public relations (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Dialogue appears to be joining and perhaps even replacing the concept of symmetry as an organizing principle in public relations theory building. The shift to dialogue is not merely terminological. Rather, it is based on an interpersonal model of ethical and effective communication whereby dialogue is the ‘simultaneous fusion with the Other [sic] while retaining the uniqueness of one’s self interest. (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 266)

Kent, Taylor and White (1998) described the relationship between two-way symmetrical communication and dialogic communication as one of process and product (p. 325). “Two-way symmetrical communication’s theoretical imperative is to provide a procedural means whereby an organization and its publics can communicate interactively... In contrast, dialogic communication refers to a particular type of relations interaction – one in which a relationship exists. Dialogue is product rather than process” (p. 325).

Dialogic communication “refers to any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325), and is guided by two principles: those who engage in dialogue “share a willingness to try to reach mutually satisfying positions,” and this dialogue is about “intersubjectivity, and not objective truth, or subjectivity” (p. 326).

Some “futurologists claim that the Internet and World Wide Web will lead organizations to more direct dialogue with consumers and other publics, and that empowered publics will increasingly demand real information and education, thereby rejecting one-sided persuasive publics” (Esrock & Leichty, 1999, p. 457).

Principles of Dialogue on the Web

Kent and Taylor outline guidelines for incorporating dialogue into Web pages and Webbed communication based on five principles: the dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness of the interface, and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327-334).

Dialogue first involves attraction whereby individuals or groups desire to interact (“usefulness of information”); for relationships to develop interactions must occur (“ease of interface”); for relationships to grow dialogue must occur (“conservation of visitors”); and for relationships to thrive, maintenance and satisfactory interactions must occur (“generation of return visits” and “dialogic loops”). (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 267)

The dialogic loop provides a feedback mechanism for publics on the Web, and it is an “appropriate starting point for dialogic communication” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327). “Without a dialogic loop in Webbed communication, Internet public relations becomes nothing more than a new monologic communication medium, or a new marketing technology” (p. 326). The dialogic loop allows audiences to question organizations, and it offers the organization a chance to respond. It is important that organizations creating dialogue on the Internet train those personnel who respond to electronic communication; the dialogic loop should be complete, and someone should be available to respond (p. 327-328). “Response is a major part of the dialogic loop, however, the content of the response is also critical for relationship building” (p. 328).

The second principle Kent and Taylor (1998) outline is usefulness of information on the Web. Organizational Web sites should include information that is useful and of “general value to all publics – even if a site contains primarily industry, or user, specific information” (p. 328). Backgrounders, briefings, press packets, and otherwise historical information employed as public relations tools are important to include on Web sites. “Many scholars have recently noted, ‘content’ is what should drive an effective Web site, and not the ‘smoke and mirrors’ and fancy graphics that many Web sites currently rely upon” (p. 328).

In addition, a logical hierarchy and structure to the Web site construction is imperative. “Audience-specific information should be organized such that it is easy to find by interested publics” (p. 328). Information of value to publics such as contact information, mailing list sign-up, and discussion boards helps to develop relationships with publics. This principle focuses on the cultivation of publics “not only to serve the public relations goals of an organization, but so that the interests, values, and concerns of publics are addressed. Information is made available to publics not to stifle debate or win their accent, but to allow them to engage an organization in dialogue as an informed partner” (p. 329).

In order to generate return visits, Kent and Taylor highlight easy-to-use Web sites with properly operating links, updating information to reflect changing issues, including interactive features such as special forums, news commentaries, online question and answer sessions, online experts to answer questions, a special section for frequently asked questions, and easily downloadable or mailed information. Web sites that have continually updated and valuable information “appear credible and suggest that an

organization is responsible” (p. 329). Interactive strategies, tools to encourage repeat visits, and updating information is an “easy way for public relations practitioners to create the conditions for dialogic relationships” (p. 329).

The fourth principle: the intuitiveness and ease of the interface refers similarly to the hierarchy and structure of the Web site. Organizationally, a Web site should be easy to understand and figure out. Features such as a table of contents, site map, and well-formatted and organized text are important. Also stressed here is the content of the Web site. “Content should take precedence over aesthetic considerations” (p. 330). Providing users with an option to choose between a “basic” text-based site or a “supercharged” site with graphics and/or sounds allows publics “to interact with the organization on their own terms” (p. 330). “Sites should be dynamic enough to encourage all potential publics to explore them, information rich enough to meet the needs of very diverse publics, and interactive enough to allow users to pursue further informational issues and dialogic relationships” (p. 330).

The final principle stresses the importance of not leading visitors to the Web site astray; visitors should be engaged to remain on the Web site, and not wander off following outside links or sponsored advertisements. “If the goal of public relations in Webbed communication is to create and foster relationships, and not to ‘entertain’ them, Web sites should include only ‘essential links’ with clearly marked paths for visitors to return to your site” (p. 331). An option to bookmark the site, a clear statement inviting visitors to return, and sparse or hidden use of sponsored advertisements helps to conserve visitors on Web sites. If a “visitor leaves your site on an external link, he/she may never get back... This principle follows Buber’s suggestion that dialogic communication should

be the goal of the interaction and not merely a means to an end such as marketing or advertising” (p. 331).

Online Dialogic Communication Studies

Kent, Taylor and White (2001) operationalized these principles in a study of how activist organizations used the Internet to build relationships, and again in 2003, the three of them examined the relationship between Web site design and organizational responsiveness to stakeholder information needs.

In Kent, Taylor and White’s (2001) study of activist organizations use of Web-based dialogic communication, the data suggests that activist organizations Web sites are not taking advantage of the dialogic capabilities of the Internet. “The Web sites do meet some of the prerequisites of dialogue, in that they are easy to use, contain useful information, and provide reasons for visitors to remain on the site. However, the relationship-building capacity of encouraging visitors to return and allowing for visitor interaction are both lacking” (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 276).

“Activist sites are best designed to meet the needs of volunteer publics; however, they are missing important opportunities to serve their policy goals. One missed opportunity is in leveraging member action” (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 277). Only 39 percent of the sites outlined how visitors could contact political leaders, which illustrates a gap between informing publics and mobilizing publics. There were also missed opportunities with the media. “For a journalist to consider using Web content to supplement a news story requires that there be content – beyond news releases and canned policy statements” (p. 277). However, merely 28 percent of activist Web sites contained frequently asked questions, or question and answer sections; similarly just 21 percent offered regularly scheduled new forums. While only 16 percent encouraged

visitors to return, and only one site in one hundred (1%) reminded visitors to “bookmark this site now” (p. 277).

In Kent, Taylor and White’s 2003 study, the researchers examined the relationship between Web site design and organizational responsiveness to stakeholder information needs of two organization types: general environmental activist and watchdog groups. “Both types of activist organizations employed poor dialogic communication, exhibited little commitment to building relationships with interested publics, and fewer than 30% of the total sample even responded to interested publics when contacted directly via e-mail” (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003, p.72).

The World Wide Web is clearly illustrated as an “excellent information dissemination tool” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325); however, its goal is not to create public dialogue. “This distinction is important. Public relations literature about the Web has operated under a monologic communication continuum, suggesting that the public relations practitioner’s role is primarily one of information gatherer and disseminator” (p. 325).

For corporations and profit making organizations, Web sites are often one of many resources in an arsenal of advertising, public relations efforts, philanthropy, issues management, and community relations efforts. For smaller, and activist/nonprofit organizations, however, Web sites emerge as a primary resource for communicating with and responding to publics. It follows then that organizations that rely almost exclusively on the Web, such as activist and nonprofit organizations, would seek to use the Internet to its fullest potential – dialogically – to create relationships with publics. (Kent, Taylor & White, 2001, p. 266-267)

The question remains, are nonprofit organizations using the Web to its fullest potential – dialogically – to build and maintain relationships with its publics? Other studies have focused on corporate, activist, and non-governmental organization Web

sites, however, no study has examined the dialogic communication utilized by nonprofit organizations on their Web sites.

Nonprofit Organizations and the Internet

There has been very little research, if any, specifically on nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that explores how these organizations are using their Web sites to relate to their stakeholders and build relationships.

The Web offers nonprofit organizations a communication tool to reach numerous publics: the media, donors and volunteers, potential donors and volunteers, corporate partners, potential granting agencies, and more. “With the arrival of the WWW... local NPOs now have the opportunity to take their message global with same level of funding [as other organizations]” (Elliott, Katsiolouides, & Weldon, 1998, p. 300). But, the question is, are nonprofits taking their message global and using the Internet and their Web sites to the full extent this communication tool provides?

Some believe special interest groups, NGOs, and a variety of anti-corporate and anti-capitalism organizations (ACOs), have taken better advantage of these opportunities and used the Internet more effectively for public relations purposes than many corporations and most public relations and advertising agencies. Most corporate and agency websites focus upon information dissemination and communication outputs. However, special interest, NGO and ACO web sites focus on communication outcomes, and provide more interactive opportunities which enhance relationship development. (Wright, 2001, p. 8-9)

The organizations cited above have used new technologies to effectively advance their positions, and by doing so have gained the respect of the media, government and public opinion. “Research has found many of these groups are successful because they have effectively used their Web sites to build relationships with various publics” (Wright, 2001, p. 8). Ferguson (1984) predicted that “the area of public relationships offered the best opportunity for theory development in public relations” (p. 32). In theory

development focusing on public relationships, “the relationship is the prime issue of concern” (p. 32).

Web sites offer many opportunities for individuals and groups to have their points of view evaluated by media reporters and other interested publics. The Web also serves as “a venue for two or more entities to debate public policy issues” (Heath, 1998, p. 275).

Other advantages of the Internet specifically noted for nonprofits, NGOs, activists and special interest groups include:

1. A low cost, direct, controllable communication channel.
2. The Internet is direct, there is no intermediary needed to deliver the message.
3. The Internet is controlled; the organization decides what material will appear and when it will appear.
4. A Web site can contain a vast amount of information available in an array of formats including text, audio and video (p. 298).

A handful of articles have been published on how to build effective Web sites for nonprofits and how to utilize technology in nonprofit efforts (Making Web Sites, 2004; Wallace, 2001a; Wallace, 2004a; Wallace, 2004c; Greene, 2001). There have even been findings that more nonprofit organizations, specifically foundations, are producing online annual reports, rather than printed publications (Kerkman, 2003). However, most research focusing on the Web as a communication tool for nonprofits explores current efforts by organizations with a case study approach (Greene, 2001), or a simple reporting mechanism, such as, what NPOs are doing on the Web (Nonprofit Organizations and Using Technology, 2001).

In the *Corporate Philanthropy Report* (2004), six tips from software provider Kintera Inc. are outlined to make Web sites more welcoming and responsive to donors:

1. Provide personalized, targeted content to supporters.
2. Educate with interactions, not just content.
3. Provide an easy way to donate online.
4. Scale and redundancy = reliability.
5. Provide immediate acknowledgement.
6. Make it simple to take further action.

By providing “dynamic content based on member preferences,” nonprofit organizations can engage supporters on their Web site, and thereby, make the nonprofit site a “primary point of interest” (*Corporate Philanthropy Report*, 2004, p. 5). A personalized and targeted experience, such as a personal account login with the capability to track giving and volunteering, will “encourage community members to return to the Web site more often, which should also increase their donations and volunteer activities” (p. 5). Through activities such as polls, quizzes, and games, nonprofits can provide interactive opportunities for donors to become knowledgeable about the organization’s mission and various initiatives. Nonprofits can also “allay security fears first by ensuring that their Web site donation collection function is secure by using a reputable vendor, and by posting security symbols and statements for Web visitors” (p. 5). Donors are more likely to give if they are offered a selection of online payment options such as major credit cards, electronic checks or PayPal, or an opportunity to print and mail in their preferred method of donation. Making it easy to give also helps to generate more donations (p. 5). “Nonprofits must account for both scale and redundancy in their Web site payment area to ensure that a smooth and efficient transaction takes place, and that the site runs smoothly 24/7” (p. 5).

In addition, after donating, supporters should receive some form of personalized acknowledgement or thank you. “Confirming the donation immediately, as well as listing the amount, lets supporters know that their online gift was received with no

complications” (p. 5). One click of the mouse should take donors to other actions such as volunteering for an event or activity. By making it easy for supporters to get engaged in other areas within an organization, nonprofits can build loyalty and keep volunteers and donors involved.

In a survey conducted in February 2003 of 1,080 nonprofit groups and more than 9,000 Internet users, researchers found that many Internet users are going online to research nonprofit organizations, and then taking action offline. “Nearly 60 percent of the Internet users surveyed said they had used the Internet to engage in the work of nonprofit organizations, and most of those visitors went online to get more involved” (Howard, 2003, p. 41). Moreover, this kind of involvement and support, which is generated from the organization’s Web site, is not necessarily measured – “particularly when it occurs offline. Therefore, the charities often may not see the real return on the investment they have made in their Web sites” (p. 41).

“The Internet is expanding support for nonprofit groups, both by engaging new audiences and by getting loyal supporters to do something new or something more” (p. 41). More than a fifth of respondents who took action after visiting a nonprofit group’s Web site said they would not otherwise have taken that action, and another 40 percent said they weren’t sure they would have taken action without visiting the Web site first, “suggesting that the unrealized potential for charities to use the Internet could be significant” (p. 42). In addition, the organizational Web site offers a real advantage in reaching out to cultivate potential donors and build the pipeline for new donors. As the research suggests, interested parties are going online to find information about organizations (Howard, 2003, p. 41), and the World Wide Web when used to its fullest

potential can be a communication tool for interactivity to cultivate and build new relationships with donors and potential donors.

In addition, the importance of accountability is evident from the respondents in this survey. Users ranked availability of information on how donations are spent as the second most important feature of a good Web site (p. 42). “Nonprofit groups think visitors want a site that looks good. What they really want is a site that tells them how their dollars will be used to do good” (p. 42).

Online giving is a Web-based tool that is unique to nonprofit organizations. It is unique in that nonprofit organizations are one of the few types of organizations able to utilize a tool such as this on their Web sites, because their organizational mission specifically supports this type of activity. For-profit organizations or governmental organizations are unable to utilize a tool such as this on their Web sites, because their organizational mission does not support this type of activity. This Web-based tool is unique to nonprofit organizations and offers opportunities for interactivity, including the ability to secure donations as well as to assist in the relationship-building process between organizations and publics. While there have been several surveys (Austin, 2001; Larose, 2003; Wallace, 2001b; Wallace, 2002; Wallace, 2003; Wallace, 2004b) reporting the dollar totals for online donations, online giving has not been explored as a relationship-building tool on NPO Web sites either.

Utilizing an interactive opportunity such as online giving provides a Web-based dialogic loop for nonprofit organizations. This transactional interaction between the organization and its donors provides the conditions for dialogue and two-way

communication. Online giving is the first step to open the door for increased interaction between nonprofit organizations and its publics.

“Early evidence suggests that technology will make giving easier, attract more first-time donors, and stimulate bigger-than-average donations. Research on workplace-giving systems that use online technology shows that employees are spending significantly more time learning about and interacting with the nonprofit organizations to which they will donate” (Austin, 2001, p. 72).

Contributions made in the days following the September 11 attacks “dwarfed all previous Internet fund-raising campaigns. Wallace (2001b) reported on October 4, 2001, that “more than \$70 million of the \$676 million in contributions to relief efforts following the terrorists’ attacks have come in online” (p. 22). While in June of 2002, the numbers had significantly climbed: “Charities throughout the nonprofit world are buoyed by online-giving totals that are climbing at significantly higher rates than overall fund raising, even in the midst of a sluggish economy, and by the more than \$215 million that was donated online by people who wanted to help victims of the September 11 attacks” (Wallace, 2002, p. 23).

Fund raising over the Internet has experienced exponential growth. In 1999, according to estimates by the Initiative on Social Enterprise, about 4 percent of donors contributed online, giving about \$10 million. In 2000, online donors gave an estimated \$250 million. The Initiative on Social Enterprise projects that by 2010 one-third of money donated will be given online (Austin, 2001, p. 72).

The latest 2003 numbers by the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported a surge in online donations during the year, “many groups posted double- and triple-digit

percentage gains, according to the *Chronicle's* fifth annual survey of online fund raising. Combined Internet donations to the 157 nonprofit groups that provided data for this year's survey topped \$100-million" (Wallace, 2004b). "Over all, online gifts rose by 48 percent at the 146 organizations that provided figures for 2003 and 2002, up from \$60.5-million in 2002," which does not include the \$65.9 million received by the American Red Cross, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks during its 2002 fiscal year and \$1.9-million in its 2003 fiscal year (Wallace, 2004b). "Online donations doubled at 46 of the 146 charities, while another 36 chalked up gains of more than 50 percent" (Wallace, 2004b).

In a survey conducted in February 2003 of 1,080 nonprofit groups and more than 9,000 Internet users, only one-fifth of the 547 charities that seek online donations reported receiving more than 5 percent of their gifts via the Internet (Howard, 2003, p. 41). "Many Internet users say they go online to get information about the causes and nonprofit organizations they want to support, and often they take action offline as a result" (p. 41).

Likewise, the Internet can play an important role in donations made by more traditional methods, such as mail or phone, rather than online. "A Web site's ability to persuade donors to mail or call in a gift may be more significant than the amount of money that actually comes in electronically." Many contributions are "inspired by the Internet but come through in traditional channels as a side benefit of online giving that too many organizations underestimate" (Wallace, 2002, p. 26).

E-philanthropy has altered the landscape of the social-capital markets, and it will continue to do so in the future. New channels for connecting donors and nonprofit groups have been created. Flows of information and funds will continue to grow geometrically. Donors will be more informed and able to deploy their philanthropic

resources more intelligently. As nonprofit organizations master this new arena, the philanthropic marketplace will become more democratic and efficient... the e-philanthropy enterprises hold the potential to stimulate an overall increase in giving. (Austin, 2001, p. 73)

The opportunity to utilize interactivity through online giving is already present, and this provides a dialogic loop through which nonprofit organizations can communicate and further develop this relationship. The opportunity to make a gift online offers a transactional interaction between the donor and the organization, and the opportunity for two-way communication is ever present after a gift is made. By providing online giving opportunities as a first step, organizations are opening the door for increased interaction with their donor publics.

Research Questions

Based on the preceding literature review, this study explores the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What are the dialogic characteristics of college and university Web sites?
- RQ 1A: What are the dialogic characteristics of online giving on college and university Web sites?
- RQ 2: With which publics are colleges and universities seeking to engage in dialogue through their Web sites?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The goal of this study is to explore the public relations and communications implications of 1) the extent to which dialogic characteristics are used on the Web sites of colleges and universities, 2) the extent to which the characteristics of online giving are utilized as a form of interaction, and 3) with which publics these organizations are seeking to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web site. The study included the completion of a content analysis of 128 college and university Web sites represented in the Philanthropy 400, which were examined during the period of January 3, 2005 to January 31, 2005.

“Content analysis has been used for decades as a microscope that brings communication messages into focus” (McMillan, 2000, p. 80). Berelson (1952) originally defined content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). Krippendorff (2004) defined content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18).

Content analysis can be conducted on two levels: manifest or latent content (Stacks, 2002, p. 109). This study is conducted using manifest content, what is actually seen and counted. “Manifest content may be seen as reflecting the answers that questions of definition and fact seek. It is easily defined, quantified, and counted” (p. 109).

The major advantages to content analysis are the technique's ability to objectively and reliably describe a message or group of messages and its application to advanced statistical analysis (Stacks, 2002, p. 108). Second, content analysis provides both logical and statistical bases for understanding how messages are created. "Content analysis focuses on messages or communications actually produced in practice and in that regard may be considered a major methodological tool that bridges informal and formal methods" (p. 108).

There are four distinguishing features of content analysis as compared to other techniques used in social science research (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 40-42):

1. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique.
2. Content analysis can handle unstructured matter as data.
3. Content analysis is context sensitive and therefore allows the researcher to process as data texts that are significant, meaningful, informative and even representational to others.
4. Content analysis can cope with large volumes of data.

The major disadvantage of content analysis is that it requires the actual messages be recorded for analysis (Stacks, 2002, p. 108). With the explosion of electronic recording and archiving of content, and particularly the availability of the content for this study on the World Wide Web, this limitation was easily minimized. Another limitation of content analysis is the findings of a particular content analysis are limited to the framework of the categories and definitions used in that analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991, p. 160). In order to minimize this limitation, it is important that the categories are precisely defined. Content analysis techniques are expected to be reliable, replicable and yield valid results (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). "Replicability is the most important form of reliability" (p. 18). Researchers who are working at different times and under different

circumstances should be able to obtain the same results when applying the same technique to the same data (p. 18). In addition, content analysis is frequently time consuming and expensive (p. 161). The task of analyzing and classifying a large volume of content is both laborious and tedious.

Sample and Unit of Analysis

This study is based on a census of the colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400, an annual list compiled by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, which ranks the top 400 nonprofit organizations based on fund-raising totals for the previous fiscal year. These Philanthropy 400 organizations represent the U.S.'s most well supported nonprofit organizations, and should therefore be assumed to be leaders in their public relations and fund-raising practices. Public relations departments that demonstrate excellence in the field increase the effectiveness of their organizations (Grunig, 1992). Therefore, it seems logical to assume that Philanthropy 400 organizations, which raise the most private dollars of nonprofits, can reasonably be believed to be building and maintaining favorable relationships with their publics. This study focuses on three specific publics identified through the literature that are essential to the fund-raising and public relations goals of colleges and universities: media, alumni and donors. Likewise, it can reasonably be believed that these Philanthropy 400 organizations that are extremely successful in their fund-raising efforts would also be successful in cultivating and maintaining relationships with the media, alumni and donors.

The education subsection of the Philanthropy 400 is comprised of 129 colleges and universities and 8 educational groups (see attached listing of the colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 in Appendix A). In 2003 these educational organizations generated more than \$15 billion in private support and represent more than

a third of the organizations in the Philanthropy 400 (Hallet al, 2004, p. 46). The 129 colleges and universities represented in the education subsection accounted for more than \$14.5 billion of this private support.

Since 1991, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, which bills itself as “The Newspaper of the Non-Profit World” (Kelly, 1998, p. 75), has compiled and published the list based on financial data gathered from nonprofit organizations (Kerkman & Moore, 2004, p. 38). Most of the information in the survey relies on figures from the organizations’ Form 990 informational tax returns, while some groups provide data from their consolidated audited financial statements, and data were also gathered from annual reports and from a *Chronicle* survey form that is based on the Form 990 (p. 38).

Higher education has retained its top position in the Philanthropy 400 by wide margins in subsequent rankings since 1991 (Kelly, 1998, p. 75). In the 2003 ranking, the education subsection of the Philanthropy 400 received more than two times the private support of the second largest section, youth and social services. In addition, in the 2004 ranking, the number of educational organizations was more than three times greater in number than the 43 international organizations that represented the second largest number of organizations in the Philanthropy 400 (Kerkman et al, 2004, p. 46).

“Annual reports of giving by the AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy consistently show that education receives the highest proportion of gift dollars after religion. Of the percentage, colleges and universities receive the lion’s share” (Kelly, 1998, p. 76). Logically, the education subsection of the Philanthropy 400, which is comprised largely of colleges and universities, provided the sampling frame for this study.

The Philanthropy 400 categorized 137 organizations in the education subsection, 129 colleges and universities and 8 miscellaneous educational groups. The eight miscellaneous educational groups were excluded from the study, because while their focus was on education, since the organizations were not colleges or universities, their publics, mission, and focus would be drastically different. The remaining 129 colleges and universities in the education subsection accounted for more than \$14.5 million of private support generated and served as the sample in this study.

One additional entry within the colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 was also excluded from the content analysis: SUNY Cornell Statutory Colleges, which is actually comprised of four colleges: New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, New York State College of Human Ecology, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, and New York State College of Veterinary Medicine. In order to evaluate the SUNY entry, each of the four colleges would need to be submitted for content analysis, and an average between the four colleges would need to be tabulated in order to calculate the SUNY entry. Because this entry was comprised of more than one college, and it differed substantially from the other 128 single, college or university institutions, the SUNY Cornell Statutory Colleges entry was excluded from analysis in this study.

“In a census, the universe, population, sampling frame, and sample are all the same” (Stacks, 2002, p. 154). A census occurs when every member of a population is contacted or analyzed (Stacks, 2002, p. 154; Wimmer & Dominick, 1991, p. 63). A census is possible when the actual population is small, and the researcher has access to all members of the population under study (Stacks, 2002, p. 154). If all the members of the

population are analyzed or contacted, a researcher can say with 100 percent confidence that the results reflect the population under study (p. 154).

The 128 college and university Web sites in their entirety were designated as the unit of analysis, and each was examined to determine the use of dialogic communication on the Internet, the targeted publics, and the use of online giving features. Instead of simply analyzing the Home page of each Web site, all major links from the Home page were analyzed. In addition, if a major link from the Home page connected to another Web site associated with the college or university, such as a fund-raising foundation or an alumni association, this site was also examined as it related to the organization's targeted publics. However, every link on each college or university Web site was not analyzed. Individual college or school Web sites within the larger college or university site were not examined. For example, if a university site had a Web page related to the College of Business within the university, and on the College of Business' Web page, that page included information for media, alumni or donors, this page was not specifically examined in this study. This study focused on the more broad sense of the college or university Web site, and did not migrate down to each individual college or school within the larger college or university. When an item was not initially observed, the coders conducted a key word search or searched the Web directory of the site. If the search engine or directory failed to provide the item information, it was then coded non-existent.

Operational Definitions of Variables

An operational definition is a clear statement of what is to be observed (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991, p. 44). "Operational definitions are indispensable in scientific research because they enable investigators to measure relevant variables" (p. 44). By defining a variable operationally, this forces the researcher to express abstract concepts in concrete

terms (p. 45). Since this study measured the five principles of dialogic communication as well as targeted publics and online giving features, these variables must be operationally defined. In order to operationalize the five principles of dialogic communication, each principle was defined, and characteristics of each principle were identified to measure in the content analysis. The five principles of incorporating dialogue into Web-based communication are: ease of interface, usefulness of information, a dialogic loop, conservation of visitors and generation of return visits (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327-334).

Ease of Interface

Ease of interface is based on the idea that visitors should have an easy time navigating a site and finding information (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 269). Ease of interface is a prerequisite to Web-based dialogic communication and is a good predictor of dialogic potential, because if a site is not “user-friendly,” then visitors will not have a positive experience at the site and may not be encouraged to return (p. 269). Ease of interface is simply defined as enabling users to easily navigate a Web site. Characteristics of Web sites that make ease of interface possible include: clearly identifying a site map or web directory on the Home page; clearly identifying major links to the rest of the site on the Home page; incorporating a search engine on the Home page; utilizing the logo of the organization on the Home page; incorporating minimal use of graphics in the Web design; and enabling users to view the Web site without images.

Targeted Publics

Clear targeting on the Home page of specific segments of their overall publics helps organizations reach their communications, public relations and fund raising goals. It also facilitates ease of use for the targeted groups. Numerous publics were identified

through the literature and during the pre-test sample that colleges and universities might target with their Web sites. This study explored which publics among: alumni, community, companies/organization interested in career placement, donors, faculty/staff/employees, friends, job seekers, legislators, media, parents, patients, students, and trustees, were targeted by name on the Home pages of these college and university Web sites. If a public was targeted by name and not listed above, the researchers wrote down the public in the “other” category.

Usefulness of Information

Another principle of dialogic communication is usefulness of information. As mentioned previously, a variety of publics are often targeted on the Home page of Web sites, and organizations attempt to provide information on the Web that is of interest to each group targeted (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 269). “Audience-specific information should be organized such that it is easy to find by interested publics” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 328). This principle focuses on the cultivation of publics “not only to serve the public relations goals of an organization, but so that the interests, values, and concerns of publics are addressed” (p. 329). Usefulness of information is defined as the presence of information of value and interest to targeted publics.

Media, alumni and donors were identified through the literature as essential publics to the fund-raising and public relations goals of the colleges and universities in the sample. If one of these publics was not clearly identified on the Home page of a site, the researchers investigated major links from the Home page to locate information for that public, and if information organized for that public was still not located, a keyword search of the site was done.

The media is an important public to colleges and universities because it helps build awareness of the institution by disseminating information to the general and more targeted public. Alumni are an important public to the college or university's future; they are its foundation, advocates for their alma mater, and many times they become its strongest financial supporters. In addition, donors and potential donors are an important public from which colleges and universities cultivate financial support. Colleges and universities participate in a mutually beneficial relationship with each of these publics, and likewise, one would assume that colleges and universities would provide as much useful information as possible to cultivate and maintain this relationship on the Web.

Features of usefulness to the media were identified as the availability of: press releases; an archive of press releases; speeches; biographical information; philosophy/mission statement; downloadable graphics; audio or video clips; news forums; a listing of experts or sources, and a clearly identified media contact. Features of usefulness to alumni included: how to become affiliated/get involved; how to contribute money; calendar of alumni events; job opportunities; alumni travel opportunities; online merchandise/shopping; an alumni magazine or publication; notes about each graduating class, sometimes referred to as "Class Notes"; an alumni/membership group, and inclusion of benefits and online signup for the alumni/membership group. Features of usefulness to donors were identified as: how to contribute money; benefits/incentives for giving; information on how donations were used/spent; and how to become affiliated/get involved.

Dialogic Loop

The dialogic loop provides a feedback mechanism for publics on the Web, and it serves an "appropriate starting point for dialogic communication" (Kent & Taylor, 1998,

p. 327). The dialogic loop allows audiences to question organizations, and it offers the organization a chance to respond. The most important feature of a dialogic Web site is the incorporation of interactivity (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 271). A Web site cannot be fully dialogic if it does not offer and follow through on two-way communication.

Dialogic loop is defined as the incorporation of interactivity on the Web.

Interactive features were explored for both alumni and donor publics. Characteristics of interactivity and incorporation of a dialogic loop include: opportunity for users to send messages to the organization; opportunity to request regular information updates; opportunity to update contact information; opportunity to vote on issues; opportunity to fill out a survey, poll, or give opinion on issue(s); opportunity to send a postcard; opportunity to participate in quizzes and games; and opportunity to log in to own e-mail/Web account.

It is equally important to note that offering these features alone does not constitute a dialogic loop. While this study was able to identify and examine those characteristics of dialogue on the Web that establish a foundation for dialogic communication, this study was unable to examine the responsiveness of the organization; organizations must actually respond to complete the dialogic loop and engage in two-way communication.

In addition, another characteristic of interactivity was identified by the author as an opportunity for a dialogic loop with donor publics: online giving features. Online giving is a Web-based tool that is unique to nonprofit organizations. It is unique in that nonprofit organizations are one of the few types of organizations able to utilize a tool such as this on their Web sites, because their organizational mission specifically supports this type of activity. This Web-based tool offers opportunities for interactivity, including the ability

to secure donations as well as to assist in the relationship-building process between organizations and publics. The opportunity to make a gift online offers a transactional interaction between the donor and the organization.

The following characteristics of online giving were examined: the presence or absence of an online donation option; the type of online payment options available: credit card, electronic check, pay pal, mail-in form, phone number to call in donation; the incorporation of a message about a “Secure” Web site; the inclusion of a frequently asked questions section; and a clearly identified contact for donations. This study was unable to examine how organizations engaged in dialogue after an online donation was made; however, by providing online giving opportunities as a first step, organizations are opening the door for increased interaction with their donor publics.

Conservation of Visitors

Conservation of visitors stresses the importance of not leading visitors to the Web site astray; visitors should be engaged to remain on the Web site, and not wander off following outside links or sponsored advertisements. It is important to engage visitors the first time they visit a Web site by providing information that is both current and timely. Web sites that have continually updated and valuable information “appear credible and suggest that an organization is responsible” (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 329).

Conservation of visitors is defined as “stickiness” and timeliness, characteristics that encourage visitors to remain or stay on the organization’s Web site (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 331). Features of conservation of visitors include: clear posting of the date and time the site was last updated; speed in which the Home page of the site loaded; recently updated news stories or public information; absence of outside links (not belonging to the

organization) on the Home page; and an opportunity to subscribe to regular information from the organization by e-mail.

Generation of Return Visits

The principles of generation of return visits and conservation of visitors go hand-in-hand. Conservation of visitors establishes the conditions that encourage return visitors. Organizations genuinely want visitors to return to their Web site on a regular basis, or why would they devote the necessary resources to their Web sites in the first place? The principle of generation of return visits is an important function of relationship building, because “relationships are not established in one-contact communication interactions” (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 270). Features of Web sites that encourage return visitors include: appealing to visitors with an explicit statement inviting them to return; encouraging visitors to bookmark the site; providing visitors with question and answer or frequently-asked-questions forums; a calendar of events; downloadable information, such as PDF files, and interactive opportunities such as polls, quizzes, surveys, games or e-postcards.

Coder Training and Inter-coder Reliability

Two coders, the researcher and another University of Florida employee, who was not familiar with the study, worked independently and coded the Web sites. Careful training of the coders is an integral part of any content analysis and usually results in a more reliable analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991, p. 168). Before formal coding began, a pilot study was conducted to check intercoder reliability. A pretest sample of 20 Web sites (15.5 percent) were coded. The first 5 Web sites in the random sample of 20 were coded by the researcher and the employee together, and then the remaining 15 sites were coded independently.

The intercoder reliability for the pre-test sample was 92.20 percent based on Holsti's formula and 85.10 percent based on Scott's pi. "Scott's pi is lower than Holsti's reliability coefficient, having factored out chance agreement between coders" (Stacks, 2002, p. 117). Intercoder reliability indicates the level of agreement among independent coders who are coding using the same research instrument (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). The following formula was applied to determine Holsti's reliability coefficient for the study, where R is the coefficient of reliability, M is the number of coding decisions agreed upon, N₁ is the total number of coding decisions made by the first coder, and N₂ is the total number of coding decisions made by the second coder (Stacks, 2002, p. 116):

$$R = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

In this study, Holsti's value of intercoder reliability was 92.20 percent. "'Good' coder reliability is obtained when coders agree on coding content at least 90 percent of the time (Stacks, 2002, p. 116).

The following formula was applied to determine Scott's pi, where the % observed agreement equals the percentage of agreement between the coders, and the % expected agreement equals the sum of the squared observed outcomes.

$$Pi = (\% \text{ observed} - \% \text{ expected agreement}) / (1 - \% \text{ expected agreement})$$

In this study the value of Scott's pi was 85.10 percent, having factored out chance agreement between coders. Scott's pi is a more conservative reliability formula that takes into account the possibility that the coders agreed on their coding due to chance (Stacks, 2002, p. 116). Scott's pi was also above an acceptable coefficient of reliability of 80 percent or above when factoring in chance (Poindexter & McCoombs, 200, p. 203).

Coding

Coders were provided with the name of the college or university and its location. The coders then used the Google search engine (www.google.com) to locate the Web site of the institution. The coders initially coded the name of the college or university, its Web address, and the date and time the site was evaluated. Each Home page was printed for archival purposes. The coders then reviewed each Web site using the coding instrument in Appendix B and evaluated the presence or absence of certain characteristics for each of the five principles of dialogic communication, the publics targeted on the Home page, and the online giving features available. The 102-item coding instrument included a range of 4 to 10 questions per dimension with a mean of 10.1 questions per category. Web sites were accessed from average speed and performance computers to determine the speed at which the Home page loaded.

During the pre-test sample, the researcher observed how the coding instrument actually functioned in the content analysis and made a few adjustments to improve the instrument and ensure mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. In the category of generation of return visits, a question was added to observe any use of interactivity on the Home page, such as a poll, quiz, survey, game, or e-postcard. The observation of a news forum was deleted and moved from the generation of return visits category to be included in the usefulness of information to the media category. An additional question was added to the media usefulness of information category to observe the presence or absence of a listing of experts or sources. Patients were added as a public targeted by name on the Home page due to the number of observations of this public during the pre-test sample. Lastly, in the dialogic loop section for both alumni and donors, several questions were combined as it was determined that filling out a survey, poll or giving an opinion on

issue(s) were very similar questions, and that one response would be inclusive of any of these opportunities for interactivity. Likewise, quizzes and games were combined into one question, because they were included in similar questions observing similar opportunities for interactivity. The 20 Web sites examined in the pre-test sample were then recoded based upon the final coding instrument used.

Subsequent to coding, in order to minimize coder bias toward the Web sites, the colleges' and universities' rank in the Philanthropy 400, public or private status, 2003 private support, income, expenses, and alumni participation percentages, were collected. The Philanthropy 400 list from *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* provided rank, public or private status, 2003 private support, income, and expenses. Alumni participation percentages and related alumni statistics were obtained from the Council on Aid to Education's (CAE) Voluntary Support of Education (VSE) Survey from www.cae.org. The VSE Data Miner is a web-based service which provides subscribers interactive access to 300 data variables about private giving collected annually through the VSE Survey.

Data Analysis

The information gathered from the coding instrument was coded and organized into Microsoft Excel. A copy of the code sheet can be found in Appendix C. The data was submitted into analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 11.0. In answering the first research question concerning the dialogic characteristics of educational organizations' Web sites, frequencies and means of each characteristic were tabulated. To better calculate the strength of each of the dialogic principles evaluated, a composite "index score" was also created for each principle. The index averaged the questions in each dimension allowing for the comparison of Kent and

Taylor's dialogic principles as well as the author's addition of online giving as a characteristic of interactivity. The second research question concerning which publics were targeted on these Web sites, utilized means and frequencies.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The results of the content analysis help to answer each of the three research questions. The characteristics related to the five principles of dialogic communication, ease of interface, usefulness of information, a dialogic loop, conservation of visitors and generation of return visits, as well as online giving features and targeted publics, were evaluated and measured in the content analysis. Each principle included five to 19 items, which were evaluated based on the presence or absence of each item, and a composite “index score” was also created for each principle. This chapter describes the results of the content analysis.

Research Question 1 and Research Question 1A

RQ 1: What are the dialogic characteristics of college and university Web sites?

This research question seeks to learn to what extent colleges and universities are incorporating dialogue into their Web sites based on the five principles of dialogic communication: ease of interface, usefulness of information, a dialogic loop, conservation of visitors and generation of return visits (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327-334).

Ease of Interface

Of the 128 college and university Web sites examined, 75 percent of the Web sites included a site map or Web directory on the Home page; 100 percent of the sites identified major links to the rest of the site on the Home page; 89.8 percent of the sites incorporated a search engine on the Home page; 98 percent of the sites utilized its college

or university logo on the Home page; 82.8 percent of the sites incorporated minimal use of graphics; and 24.2 percent enabled users to view the Web site without images.

The composite “index score” for ease of interface, on a scale of 0 to 6, had a mean score of 4.70. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 93.8 percent scored positively on four or more of the characteristics, while 64.7 percent scored positively on five or more of the characteristics, and 13.3 percent scored positively on all six characteristics.

Usefulness of Information

Media, alumni and donors were identified as essential publics to the fund-raising and public relations goals of the colleges and universities in this sample, and each public was examined separately to determine the usefulness of information present for that specific public.

Media

The media was frequently targeted on the Home pages of the 128 college and university Web sites; 98.4 percent of the Web sites targeted the media on the Home page. Press releases were available on 96.9 percent of the Web sites, while 92.2 percent also had an archive of press releases, which were arranged either chronologically (83.6 percent), topically (6.3 percent) or both chronologically and topically (1.6 percent). The mean time length of press archives was 63.95 months, more than five years in length; 53.1 percent of the archives included news releases dating back at least five years, while 24.2 percent of the archives dated back at least 8 years, and 8.6 percent dated back more than 10 years. Fewer than 25 percent (23.4 percent) of the Web sites included speeches; 35.9 percent included biographical information, and 30.5 percent included the organization’s philosophy or mission statement. Downloadable graphics were available

on 33.6 percent of the Web sites, and audio or video clips were available on 40.6 percent of the sites.

Most of the Web sites (80.5 percent) clearly identified a media contact; however just 70.3 percent included the name; 73.4 percent included a title; and 57 percent included an address; while 87.5 percent included a phone number, and 86.7 percent included an e-mail address. Very few sites, only 7 (5.5 percent) had a news forum, but 63.3 percent included a listing of experts or sources for the media.

The composite “index score” for usefulness of information to the media, on a scale of 0 to 16, had a mean value of 9.75. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 66.4 percent scored positively on 9 or fewer of the characteristics of usefulness of information to the media, while 25.8 percent scored positively on 10 of the characteristics, and 22.7 percent scored positively on 12 or more characteristics. Three Web sites (2.3 percent) scored positively on 15 characteristics; however, none of the Web sites scored positively on all 16 characteristics of usefulness of information to the media.

Alumni

Alumni were also frequently targeted on the Home page of these Web sites; 97.7 percent of college and university Web sites targeted alumni on the Home page. Most of the Web sites (90.6 percent) informed alumni of how to become affiliated or get involved, and 76.6 percent explained how to contribute money to the organization. Many of the Web sites (87.5 percent) included an alumni magazine or publication, and 73.4 percent included news about each graduating class, frequently referred to as “Class Notes”. An alumni or membership group was available on 85.2 percent of the Web sites; 82 percent included benefits of the membership group, and 73.4 percent offered online sign-up for the group. Most of the Web sites (96.1 percent) included a calendar of alumni

events; 82.8 percent included job opportunities; 86.7 percent offered alumni travel opportunities; while 68.8 percent included online merchandise or shopping on their Web site.

On a scale of 0 to 12, the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni had a mean value of 10.01. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 74.2 percent scored positively on 10 or more characteristics, and notably 41 Web sites (32.0 percent) scored positively on all 12 characteristics.

Donors

Donors were less frequently targeted on the Home pages of college and university Web sites than alumni and the media; 75 percent of the sites targeted donors on the Home page. Almost 97 percent (96.9 percent) of the Web sites explained how to contribute money to the organization, and almost 80 percent (78.9 percent) explained how donations are used or spent; however, 58.6 percent offered benefits or incentives for giving, and less than 40 percent (36.7 percent) explained how to become affiliated or get involved.

On a scale of 0 to 5, the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to donor publics had a mean value of 3.46. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 25.8 percent scored positively on all five characteristics, while 53.1 percent scored positively on four or more; however, 22.7 percent scored positively on two or fewer of the five characteristics.

Dialogic Loop

Alumni and donors were again identified as essential publics to the fund-raising and public relations goals of the colleges and universities in this sample, and these two publics were examined separately to determine the incorporation of a dialogic loop for that specific public.

Alumni

Of the 128 college and university Web sites examined, 81.1 percent of the sites offered an opportunity for alumni user response, either by e-mail, bulletin, message or chat board, while 58.6 percent included a mechanism to request regular information updates from the organization. Many of the sites (85.9 percent) included a means for alumni to update contact information, but fewer than 70 percent (64.8 percent) included an opportunity for alumni to log in to their own e-mail or Web account. Very few of the Web sites incorporated voting (7 percent); an opportunity to fill out a survey, poll or give opinion on issue(s) (10.9 percent); an opportunity to send a postcard (24.2 percent); or an opportunity to participate in quizzes or games (11.7 percent) for alumni publics.

On a scale of 0 to 8, the composite “index score” for a dialogic loop with alumni publics had a mean value of 3.44. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, none of the Web sites scored positively on all eight characteristics, and nine Web sites (7.0 percent) did not score positively on any of the characteristics. Almost half of the college and university Web sites (48.4 percent) scored positively on three or fewer characteristics, and more than three-quarters (77.3 percent) scored positively on four or fewer characteristics. Only 29 Web sites (22.7 percent) scored positively on five or more characteristics.

Donors

Most of the 128 college and university Web sites (85.2 percent) offered an opportunity for donor user response, either by e-mail, bulletin, message or chat board. However, very infrequently were any other interactive opportunities for a dialogic loop utilized for donor publics. Only seven Web sites (5.5 percent) included an opportunity for donors to request regular information updates from the organization, while only 14 Web

sites (10.9 percent) included a way for donors to update their contact information, and only seven Web sites (5.5 percent) included a means for donors to log in to their own e-mail or Web account. None of the Web sites offered an opportunity for donors to send a postcard; only one site offered an opportunity to vote or fill out a survey, poll, or give opinion on issue(s), and only two Web sites included an opportunity to participate in quizzes or games for donor publics.

On a scale of 0 to 8, the composite “index score” for a dialogic loop with donor publics had a mean value of 1.10. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 15 Web sites (11.7 percent) did not score positively on any of the characteristics for a dialogic loop with donor publics; 70.3 percent scored positively on only one characteristic, and 96.9 percent scored positively on two or fewer characteristics. Only 4 Web sites scored positively on more than two of the eight characteristics for a dialogic loop with donor publics.

Online giving features

RQ1A: What are the dialogic characteristics of online giving on college and university Web sites?

An additional characteristic of interactivity was identified by the author as an opportunity for a dialogic loop with donor publics: online giving features. This research question seeks to explore the extent to which the characteristics of online giving are utilized as a form of interaction on college and university Web sites.

Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 91.4 percent of the sites included an online donation option for donor publics. Within those that included an online donation option, 90.6 percent offered a credit card payment option; 18 percent offered an electronic check method; 35.2 percent included a mail-in-form for donations; 60.2

percent offered a telephone number to call in donations; while none of the sites included an option to utilize the Pay Pal service. Less than 70 percent (60.95 percent) of the sites included a message about the online donation option operating on a “Secure” Web site, and just 32.8 percent included a frequently asked questions section about donations. Almost 80 percent (78.1 percent) of the college and university sites clearly identified a contact for donations; while only 53.1 percent included a name; 60.2 percent included a title; 77.3 percent included an address; 94.5 percent included a phone number; and 93.8 percent included an e-mail address.

The composite “index score” for online giving features as a component of a dialogic loop with donor publics had a mean value of 8.47 on a scale of 0 to 14. Almost 50 percent (44.5 percent) scored positively on eight or fewer of the 14 characteristics of online giving; 20.3 percent scored positively on nine of the characteristics, and 35.2 percent scored positively on 10 or more of the characteristics. None of the sites scored positively on all 14 characteristics.

Conservation of Visitors

Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 82.8 percent of the Web sites loaded in less than one second, while the mean value for loading speed was 1.15 seconds, and all of the Web sites loaded in less than three seconds. Very few, only 17 Web sites (13.3 percent) included the last updated time and date on the Home page; however almost 97 percent (96.9 percent) of the Web sites included news stories or public information from within the last 30 days. Only 50 percent of the college and university Web sites offered an opportunity for users to subscribe for regular information updates from the organization, and 13.3 percent of the sites included outside links not belonging to the organization on the Home page.

On a scale of 0 to 4, the composite “index score” for conservation of visitors had a mean value of 2.47. Almost 50 percent (49.3 percent) of the 128 college and university Web sites scored positively on three or more characteristics, and 13.3 percent scored positively on all four characteristics; however, 42.2 percent scored positively on just two out of the four characteristics.

Generation of Return Visits

Only two Web sites (1.6 percent) of the 128 college and university Web sites included an explicit statement that invited visitors to return, and none of the sites included a statement that encouraged visitors to bookmark the site. Most of the Web sites included question and answer forums or frequently asked questions (94.5 percent) as well as a calendar of events (97.7 percent), and all 128 Web sites included downloadable information, such as PDF files. Yet, only 25 Web sites (19.5 percent) included interactive opportunities such as polls, quizzes, surveys, games or e-postcards.

On a scale of 0 to 6, the composite “index score” for generation of return visits had a mean value of 3.13. None of the college and university Web sites scored positively on all six characteristics for generation of return visits; 77.6 percent scored positively on 3 characteristics, while all the sites scored positively on four or fewer characteristics.

Composite “Index Score” of Dialogic Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the composite “index score” for all 128 colleges and universities on the incorporation of dialogic characteristics into their Web sites varied greatly for each characteristic. The colleges and universities had a mean value of 46.54 out of a possible 79.0 points for their incorporation of dialogic characteristics, scoring a mere 58.91 on a scale of 100.

1. Composite “Index Score” of Dialogic Characteristics

Characteristic	Scale of 100	Highest Possible Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Alumni - Usefulness of Information	83.40	12.00	10.01	2.43	0.22
Ease of Interface	78.39	6.00	4.70	0.82	0.07
Donor - Usefulness of Information	69.22	5.00	3.46	1.30	0.11
Conservation of Visitors	61.72	4.00	2.47	0.74	0.07
Media - Usefulness of Information	60.94	16.00	9.75	2.85	0.25
Donor - Dialogic Loop - Online Giving	60.55	14.00	8.48	2.37	0.21
Generation of Return Visits	52.21	6.00	3.13	0.46	0.04
Alumni - Dialogic Loop	42.97	8.00	3.44	1.63	0.14
Donor - Dialogic Loop	13.77	8.00	1.10	0.65	0.06
Total Score on Dialogic Characteristics	58.91	79.00	46.54	6.51	0.58

The college and university Web sites scored best on the incorporation of the dialogic characteristic: usefulness of information for alumni publics, while the sites scored the worst on incorporating a dialogic loop for donor publics. The mean value for usefulness of information for alumni publics was 10.01 out of a possible 12.00 points, scoring 83.40 on a scale of 100. Ease of interface followed closely behind with a score of 78.39 on a scale of 100, where the mean value was 4.70 out of 6.00. Usefulness of information for donor publics had a mean value of 3.46 out of a possible 5.00 with a score of 69.22 on a scale of 100, garnering the third slot for best incorporated characteristic.

Conservation of visitors ($\underline{M} = 2.47/4.00$), usefulness of information to the media ($\underline{M} = 9.75/16.00$), and incorporation of a dialogic loop for donors through online giving ($\underline{M} = 8.48/14.00$) scored in the mid-range for incorporation of these dialogic characteristics, at the fourth, fifth, and sixth slot respectively. Generation of return visits had a mean value of 3.13 out of a possible 6.0 points, scoring 52.21 on a scale of 100, garnering the third worst incorporated dialogic characteristic. Incorporation of a dialogic

loop for alumni publics with a mean value of 3.44 out of 8.0, scored next to the last with a score of 42.97 on a scale of 100, while the incorporation of a dialogic loop for donor publics brought up the rear with a score of 13.77 on a scale of 100 and a mean value of 1.10 out of a possible 8.0.

The top 25 college and university Web sites that incorporated dialogic characteristics, as shown in Appendix D, scored a mere 68.81 points out of a possible 100. The top 25 sites incorporated useful information for its alumni publics the best with a total score of 93.00 of 100, followed by useful information for donor publics with 87.20, then by ease of interface at 82.67. The top 25 schools likewise scored the worst on incorporation of a dialogic loop for alumni publics with a score of 16.50 on a scale of 100.

The college or university Web site that incorporated dialogic characteristics the best of all schools represented in the Philanthropy 400 was the University of Kansas (Lawrence). The University of Kansas ranked 161 in the Philanthropy 400, and scored perfectly on both ease of interface and donor usefulness of information, incorporating all the characteristics examined for these principles. Consistent with the other colleges and universities, KU scored worst, 25.00 on a scale of 100, for incorporation of a dialogic loop for donor publics. The University of Kansas' total combined score for incorporation of the dialogic characteristics was 78.48 on a scale of 100.

Research Question 2

RQ 2: With which publics are colleges and universities seeking to engage in dialogue through their Web sites?

This research question seeks to learn with which publics colleges and universities are attempting to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web site as a communication tool.

2. Publics Targeted on the Home Page

Publics	Targeted on Percentage of Home pages	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Media	96.90%	1.03	0.17	0.02
Students	96.90%	1.03	0.17	0.02
Alumni	96.10%	1.04	0.19	0.02
Faculty/Staff	78.10%	1.22	0.42	0.04
Donors	73.40%	1.27	0.44	0.04
Job Seekers	63.30%	1.37	0.48	0.04
Visitors	58.60%	1.41	0.49	0.04
Parents	45.30%	1.55	0.50	0.04
Community	44.50%	1.55	0.50	0.04
Friends	33.60%	1.66	0.47	0.04
Comps/Orgs Career Placement	14.10%	1.86	0.35	0.03
Trustees	2.40%	1.98	0.15	0.01
Legislators	2.30%	1.98	0.15	0.01

As shown in Table 2, the media and students were the most frequently targeted (96.9 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.03$) publics on the Home pages of the 128 college and university Web sites, with alumni following at a close third with 96.10 percent ($\bar{M} = 1.04$). Faculty and staff of colleges and universities followed with 78.10 percent ($\bar{M} = 1.22$), while donors came in at the fifth spot with 73.40 percent ($\bar{M} = 1.27$) of the sites targeting donors on the Home page. Job seekers were targeted on 63.3 percent ($\bar{M} = 1.37$) of the Web sites, while visitors were targeted on 58.60 percent ($\bar{M} = 1.41$) of the sites. Those publics targeted on less than 50 percent of the Web sites included: parents (45.30 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.55$); community (44.50 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.55$); friends (33.60 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.66$); and companies or organizations interested in career placement opportunities (14.10 percent;

$\underline{M} = 1.86$). Trustees (2.40 percent; $\underline{M} = 1.98$) and legislators (2.30 percent; $\underline{M} = 1.98$) were very infrequently targeted on the Home pages of college and university Web sites.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The Internet is the world's largest information source (Wright, 2001, p. 2), and it is a powerful communication medium for public relations practitioners to utilize. Scholars over the last 15 years have increasingly studied the impact of the World Wide Web as a public relations tool, and this study specifically explores the public relations and communications implications of RQ1) the extent to which dialogic characteristics are used on the Web sites of colleges and universities, RQ1A) the extent to which the characteristics of online giving are utilized as a form of interaction, and RQ2) with which publics these organizations are seeking to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web sites. This chapter discusses the results and implications of the study.

Incorporation of Dialogic Characteristics on the Web

The colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 incorporated the dialogic characteristics of ease of interface, usefulness of information, a dialogic loop, conservation of visitors and generation of return visits (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327-334) to varying degrees.

Ease of Interface

Ease of interface enables users to easily navigate a Web site. The 128 colleges and universities scored well on ease of interface with a mean score of 4.70 of 6.00. This was the second best incorporated characteristic of the five dialogic characteristics examined. As public relations practitioners' use of the Web as a communication tool increases and

improves, so does their ability to build effective Web-based communication pieces. It is simple enough to build a Web site, but to do it well takes time, research and work.

Organizationally, a Web site should be easy to understand and figure out. Ease of interface is a prerequisite to Web-based dialogic communication and is a good predictor of dialogic potential, because if a site is not “user-friendly,” then visitors will not have a positive experience at the site and may not be encouraged to return (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 269). Practitioners indeed have some room for improvement in incorporating several of the key principles of ease of interface.

The colleges and universities scored very positively on a number of the characteristics of ease of interface. All of the Web sites included major links to the rest of the site on the Home page, demonstrating strong organization, hierarchy and navigability on their Home pages. Almost all, 98.4 percent of the sites, utilized the college or university logo on the Home page as well; in fact, only two of the Web sites studied did not include the college or university logo on the Home page. Most organizations are identified synonymously with their respective logos, and these educational organizations likely incorporate its use on most communication pieces, including their Web sites, which presents a strong, consistent brand image and further represents the organization’s identity.

However, several simple features of ease of interface had significant room for improvement, more than 10 percent of the sites did not incorporate a search engine on the Home page, 17.2 percent of the sites relied heavily on the use of graphics on the Home page, and 25 percent of the Web sites did not include a site map or Web directory on the Home page. Search engines have become the mainstay of the Web and a key to

navigating the immense amount of information available on the Internet; it is surprising that even one of the college and university Web sites lacked a search engine. The inclusion of a search engine and a site map or Web directory assists users with finding information easily and speedily. These features work as a table of contents for the user and contribute greatly to the user-friendliness of the Web site. If users are not able to find the information they need quickly, they are likely to leave the site and possibly not return.

More than 17 percent of the college and university Web sites relied heavily on the use of graphics. This contributes to a number of user functionality problems: it takes longer for images to load, decreasing the Home page's speed of access; some users may not have the software required for broadband images and sound; and some slower computers, particularly dialup computers, spend substantial time processing images and sounds, thereby changing the users' designed experience. In addition, different Web browsers modify the way image-based Web sites are viewed by the user, which could result in an altered image and a substantially different viewing experience. "Many scholars have recently noted, 'content' is what should drive an effective Web site, and not the 'smoke and mirrors' and fancy graphics that many Web sites currently rely upon" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 328).

The greatest room for improvement was in providing users the option of viewing the Web site without images; only 24.2 percent of the 128 college and university sites enabled users to view the Web site without images. Providing the option for a simple, text-based site without images or a site with graphics and sound gives the user the ability "to interact with the organization on their own terms" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 330). Likewise offering users the choice to view images or text, gives the user the control if

they are using a slower computer to improve that experience, or if they have the software required, to participate and be engaged in a multi-media experience. College and university Web sites that rely heavily on graphics have it in their best interest to scale it down, relying less on graphics, or to give users a choice and put the viewing experience in the control of the user.

Usefulness of Information

A variety of diverse publics are often targeted on the Web, and organizations attempt to provide information that is of interest to each group targeted (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 269). Media, alumni and donors were identified as essential publics to the fund-raising and public relations goals of the colleges and universities in this sample, and each public was examined separately to determine the usefulness of information present for that specific public.

Media

The composite “index score” for usefulness of information to the media, on a scale of 0 to 16, had a mean value of 9.75, garnering the fifth best incorporated dialogic characteristic of the nine examined. It was surprising that colleges and universities did not score better in providing useful information to the media, because several research studies (Callison, 2003; Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Esrock & Leichty, 2000) have focused on the media as the primary public on the Web, and the results of these studies have noted useful, pertinent information to include online for the media’s use.

There was a positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, where $p = 0.013$, between total dollars received in private support and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to the media. Those colleges and universities that received more dollars in private support had a higher composite score on usefulness of information

to the media. The variables within usefulness of information to the media that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were downloadable graphics ($p = 0.030$), a clearly identified media contact ($p = 0.037$), media contact name ($p = 0.037$), media contact address ($p = 0.039$), media contact e-mail ($p = 0.039$), and a listing of experts or sources ($p = 0.015$).

Likewise, there was also a negative correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level, where $p = 0.033$, between the quartile for Philanthropy 400 rank and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to the media. Those colleges and universities that scored in the lower quartile of the Philanthropy 400 rank, meaning they scored in the quartile with the rank closest to number one, also scored higher on including useful information for the media on the Web. Also, the variables within usefulness of information to the media that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were downloadable graphics ($p = 0.005$), a clearly identified media contact ($p = 0.046$), media contact name ($p = 0.019$), media contact e-mail ($p = 0.024$), and a listing of experts or sources ($p = 0.043$).

Although these correlations do not imply causality, it is interesting to note that colleges and universities that provide a good media interface also seem to have strong donor responsiveness. Both of these correlations demonstrate that those colleges and universities raising more in private support, and thereby scoring higher in the Philanthropy 400 ranking, are utilizing their Web sites to provide information to the media and fostering a relationship with this public. Those colleges and universities performing well in their fund-raising efforts are likewise utilizing their Web sites to develop a relationship with the media and performing well in these efforts. A mutually

beneficial relationship with the media can contribute to increased awareness and a strongly represented image of the organization. In addition, during large scale fundraising campaigns, such as a capital campaign, the media's buzz is essential to generate increased awareness of the campaign, and can result in inquiries from the public and a heightened level of interest from the community and donors.

It was not surprising that the media was targeted on the Home page of 98.4 percent of the 128 college and university Web sites studied. The media is an important public to colleges and universities because it helps build awareness of the institution by disseminating information to the general and more targeted public; the media publishes significant research findings from colleges and universities, and the media utilizes experts and sources from colleges and universities in its own research for news stories. The media and colleges or universities participate in a mutually beneficial relationship with one another, and likewise, one would assume that colleges and universities would provide as much useful information as possible to assist the media in their newsgathering on these organizations' Web sites. However, many sites were deficient in providing information to the media in key areas.

While press releases were available on 96.9 percent of the Web sites, and 92.2 percent also had an archive of press releases, the archives were arranged in chronological order on 83.6 percent of the sites. Only 6.3 percent arranged the archives topically, and an even smaller percentage, 1.6 percent arranged the archives both chronologically and topically. The mean time length of press archives was 63.95 months, more than five years in length, and when arranged chronologically, imagine a reporter hunting for a news release that was released several months ago on a topic he or she is researching with no

further information. Instead of providing information that is useful and easily accessible, by providing an ill-organized archive with no searchability, the media's job has become a little more difficult. "Audience-specific information should be organized such that it is easy to find by interested publics" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 328). This principle focuses on the cultivation of publics "not only to serve the public relations goals of an organization, but so that the interests, values, and concerns of publics are addressed" (p. 329).

On a remarkably surprising note, and a testament to serving the interests, values and concerns of media publics, more than half of the colleges and universities, 63.3 percent, included a listing of experts or sources for the media on their Web sites. This would seem to be an extremely helpful resource for journalists to identify potential sources and experts for their news sources. Many of these listings included biographical information as well as contact information, and some were even searchable by keyword.

However, a number of the college or university Web sites were lacking in providing information that would truly benefit the media in newsgathering. Fewer than 25 percent (23.4 percent) of the Web sites included speeches; only 35.9 percent included biographical information, and only 30.5 percent included the organization's philosophy or mission statement. Speeches, biographical and background information are the bread and butter of public relations tactics, so why isn't this information organized and presented on the Web in a manner that is readily accessible to the media? As public relations practitioners evaluate their strategies and tactics on the Web, this is an area that could be targeted for marked improvement. Information that is prepared and published in print form, could be at the media's fingertips electronically on the Web. Journalists rely

heavily on the Web in conducting much of their research (Callison, 2003, p. 30), and organizations benefit from readily providing this information to its publics. Not providing information such as this makes the journalist's work just a bit more difficult, and it actually does the organization a disservice by not disseminating this information through all available mediums, so that it is readily available to all interested publics.

In addition, downloadable graphics were only available on 33.6 percent of the Web sites, and audio or video clips were only available on 40.6 percent of the sites. This is another area with room for improvement in providing useful information to the media. Stock photos are abundant in public relations departments, and providing them online improves the media's access and improves efficiency within the public relations department. Practitioners can focus on media calls, rather than requests for photos that are available via the Web. Likewise for audio and video clips, broadcast and radio journalists can easily download information, such as B-roll, at their fingertips without having to take that extra step in contacting the organization. Also, very few, only seven Web sites, included a news forum, which provides an opportunity for members of the media to interact online in a discussion format with the organization regarding a chosen topic. This is an opportunity for organizations and the media to interact and create a dialogue on the Web. With experts plentiful on any variety of topics, colleges and universities could easily integrate a news forum on a periodic basis to generate media interest and cultivate this relationship.

A very disappointing observation within the consistency of providing media contact information for colleges and universities was observed in this study. While most of the Web sites, 80.5 percent, clearly identified a media contact, only 70.3 percent

included the name; 73.4 percent included a title; and 57 percent included an address; a more frequent number, 87.5 percent, of organizations included a phone number, and 86.7 percent included an e-mail address. Such an asymmetrical approach on the part of the college or university seems to discourage dialogue and inhibits building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the media. College and university public relations departments could address this lack of symmetrical communication swiftly by being forthright with all pertinent contact information and make it available to the media online.

Alumni

The college and university Web sites scored best on the incorporation of the dialogic characteristic: usefulness of information to alumni publics. The composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni had a mean value of 10.01 of 12.00. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 74.2 percent scored positively on 10 or more characteristics, and notably 41 Web sites (32.0 percent) scored positively on all 12 characteristics. There were a number of positive correlations with usefulness of information to alumni publics including total dollars received in private support, Philanthropy 400 quartile, income, and alumni of record; however, these correlations do not suggest a causal relationship.

There was a positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, where $p = 0.009$, between total dollars received in private support and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni. Those colleges and universities that received more dollars in private support also obtained a higher composite score on usefulness of information to alumni. The variables within usefulness of information to alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were the availability of an alumni/membership group ($p = 0.020$), online signup for the membership group

($p = 0.030$), job opportunities ($p = 0.030$), travel opportunities ($p = 0.016$), and online merchandise/shopping ($p = 0.023$).

There was a negative correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, where $p = 0.005$, between the quartile for Philanthropy 400 rank and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni. Those colleges and universities that ranked in the lower quartile of the Philanthropy 400, closest to #1 in the Philanthropy 400, also scored higher on usefulness of information to alumni. The variables within usefulness of information to alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were how to become affiliated/get involved ($p = 0.029$), the availability of an alumni/membership group ($p = 0.005$), benefits for the membership group ($p = 0.041$), online signup for the membership group ($p = 0.000$), and travel opportunities ($p = 0.007$).

A positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$, where $p = 0.044$, existed between total income of the college or university and the composite “index score” for the dialogic characteristic: usefulness of information to alumni. Those colleges and universities that had a higher income scored higher on the incorporation of useful information to alumni. The variables within usefulness of information to alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were the availability of an alumni magazine or publication ($p = 0.050$), job opportunities ($p = 0.034$), and travel opportunities ($p = 0.028$).

Lastly, another positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.01$, where $p = 0.000$, existed between the total number of alumni on record and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni. Those colleges and universities with a higher total of alumni on record scored higher on the incorporation of usefulness of information

to alumni. The variables within usefulness of information to alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were how to become affiliated/get involved ($p = 0.018$), the availability of an alumni magazine or publication ($p = 0.017$), an alumni membership group ($p = 0.000$), benefits for the membership group ($p = 0.002$), online signup for the membership group ($p = 0.000$), a calendar of alumni events ($p = 0.026$), job opportunities ($p = 0.033$), travel opportunities ($p = .0000$) and online merchandise/shopping ($p = 0.000$).

Though these correlations do not imply causality, all of these correlations demonstrate that those colleges and universities raising more in private support, and thereby scoring higher in the Philanthropy 400 ranking, with a higher income, and a larger alumni of record are utilizing their Web sites to provide useful information to their alumni and cultivating, maintaining, and providing stewardship to this important public. The key to these correlations is the size, reach and breadth of the colleges and universities performing at their best on the Web. The availability of useful information to alumni is clearly evident in the number of factors contributing to these correlations; colleges and universities are doing an excellent job of incorporating a number of characteristics that foster dialogue with alumni publics through useful information dissemination on their Web sites. Perhaps wealthier colleges and universities have more income to spend on expansive Web design, however even abundant resources must still be applied within priorities, and these schools seem to have given priority to incorporating useful features for their alumni.

It is no surprise that alumni were frequently targeted on the Home page of these Web sites; 97.7 percent of college and university Web sites targeted alumni on the Home

page. Alumni often become a college or university's strongest financial supporters, so it is notable that colleges and universities are keeping pace with their alumni needs on the Web. In this study the college and university Web sites scored remarkably well on providing useful information to alumni, with few categories exhibiting a need for marked improvement. Almost all of the Web sites, 96.1 percent, included a calendar of alumni events, 90.6 percent of the sites informed alumni of how to become affiliated or get involved, and 87.5 percent included an alumni magazine or publication online, either full-text or a partial posting of the publication's printed version. The availability of all these communication tools for alumni further demonstrates the priority colleges and universities place when it comes to keeping alumni connected and participatory in their college or university's activities and initiatives.

An alumni or membership group was available on 85.2 percent of the Web sites. Some alumni membership groups were dues based and others were free to all alumni; however, the commonality online was that alumni needed to join somehow, either by providing contact information, paying dues, or making a donation. Benefits of the membership group were available on 82 percent of the sites, and 73.4 percent offered online sign-up for the group. Additional opportunities available for alumni included travel on 86.7 percent of the sites and job opportunities on 82.8 percent on the college and university Web sites.

The greatest room for improvement resides in those characteristics of usefulness of information that fell just below an 80 percent inclusion rate on the college and university Web sites. Perhaps the greatest opportunity is in educating alumni about how to contribute money to their college or university; surprisingly only 76.6 percent of the

alumni sites explained how to contribute money to the organization. This could be attributed to the segmentation of alumni from donors. While in the donor section of the Web site, the college or university may describe in great detail the options for giving, on the alumni section, however, the organization omits that information. Alumni are an active and engaged group, and their potential and likeliness to become donors is great. Less segmentation should be incorporated on the Web, so that alumni are educated in the same capacity about giving as are donors.

In addition, the college and university Web sites have a chance to expand their reach as just 73.4 percent included news about each graduating class, frequently referred to as “Class Notes”. A number of Web sites incorporated online submission of Class Notes and the opportunity to search Class Notes by name or year; however, the almost 30 percent of the college and university sites that did not incorporate a Class Notes section may be missing out on a great opportunity for alumni outreach. The Class Notes feature gives colleges and universities a chance to reach out to alumni through the friends and family that they came to know and care for in their time at the college or university. Class Notes is an entertaining, communication outreach tool that is beneficial to maintaining relationships with alumni, and it also establishes the conditions for dialogue as it requires feedback from alumni.

Another area for improvement is the incorporation of online merchandise or shopping for alumni; only 68.8 percent of the college and university Web sites included online merchandise or shopping. This is an excellent way to feature alumni gift ideas and items that are only available through the college/university or on campus. Many alumni

may enjoy sporting their alma mater on a coffee cup or a sweatshirt, and providing a link to online merchandise or shopping also facilitates ease of finding this information.

Donors

On a scale of 0 to 5, the composite “index score” for usefulness of information for donor publics had a mean value of 3.46, which garnered the third best incorporated dialogic characteristic. Remarkably of the 128 college and university Web sites, 25.8 percent scored positively on all five characteristics, while 53.1 percent scored positively on four or more; however, there is indeed room for improvement as 22.7 percent scored positively on two or fewer of the five characteristics.

Donors were less frequently targeted on the Home pages of college and university Web sites than alumni and the media; only 75 percent of the sites targeted donors on the Home page. It is surprising that 32 Web sites of the top fund-raising colleges and universities according to private dollars raised did not target donors on the Home page. This is certainly an area for the public relations function to evaluate. Targeting publics on the Home page facilitates ease of use for the specific public, as information is typically organized for that public by following a click of a hyperlink on the Home page. Simply incorporating a button to make a gift or support the university is an easy way to reach donors through the Home page of the organization, and it also facilitates ease of use for those individuals seeking to make a donation.

It is understandable and expected that 96.9 percent of the college and university Web sites explained how to contribute money to the organization. Many of the sites incorporated gift planning tools for donors and included information about annual giving and planned giving. On these sites donors can explore the various giving options within their own timeline for making a gift. “Many Internet users say they go online to get

information about the causes and nonprofit organizations they want to support” (Howard, 2003, p. 41), and it is important that this information is readily available.

Almost 80 percent of the Web sites explained how donations are used or spent; this is an excellent example of how colleges and universities are being good stewards of private donations. Providing information that highlights how gifts are used, from specific scholarship recipients, to the research a professor is able to conduct through his endowed position, to the impact of unrestricted funds, helps donors to personally identify with the organization and comprehend the reach and impact of their donation. In addition, contributions can be inspired by the information available and its potential impact (Wallace, 2002, p. 26). It is the role of public relations to highlight this information and present the human side of making a donation; in addition, by being transparent and providing information on how donations are spent, there is an increased sense of accountability that donors can observe. Providing reciprocity, responsible gift use, reporting and relationship nurturing helps to sustain relationships with donor publics and is also an excellent form of stewardship (Kelly, 1998, p. 432-442).

Surprisingly the area for the most improvement in providing useful information to donors is the inclusion of benefits or incentives for giving and how to become affiliated or get involved. Only 58.6 percent of the college and university Web sites offered benefits or incentives for giving, and less than 40 percent explained how to become affiliated or get involved. Whether the benefits are tangible, such as a commendation from the organization, or intangible, such as the sense of pride one feels from making a gift to his or her alma mater, it is important to provide potential donors all of the information that could help them reach a decision to make a donation. Numerous colleges

and universities have various levels of recognition for donors who have given a certain amount. Web sites could also provide information about the tax implications of gifts, since tax deductibility often can increase the capacity of a donor to make a gift. Information could be readily available for potential donors to learn about the incentives for making a gift, how making a gift will be received, and if any, the benefits one will receive. In addition, donors and potential donors can be a wonderful resource for volunteers as well as advocates for the organization. The lack of information describing how to become affiliated or get involved with these colleges and universities is surprising. The public relations function could highlight, promote and advocate involvement in the organization's activities, initiatives and programs on the Web.

Dialogic Loop

Alumni and donors were again identified as essential publics to the fund-raising and public relations goals of the colleges and universities in this sample, and these two publics were examined separately to determine the incorporation of a dialogic loop for that specific public.

The dialogic loop provides a feedback mechanism for publics on the Web, and it serves as an "appropriate starting point for dialogic communication" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327). The dialogic loop allows audiences to question organizations, and it offers the organization a chance to respond. The most important feature of a dialogic Web site is the incorporation of interactivity (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 271). A Web site cannot be fully dialogic if it does not offer and follow through on two-way communication.

Alumni

On a scale of 0 to 8, the composite “index score” for a dialogic loop with alumni publics had a mean value of 3.44. The incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni publics was the second worst incorporated dialogic characteristic. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, none of the Web sites scored positively on all eight characteristics, and 7.0 percent did not score positively on any of the characteristics.

A negative correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$, where $p = 0.023$, existed between the quartile for Philanthropy 400 rank and the composite “index score” for the dialogic characteristic: dialogic loop with alumni. Those colleges and universities that ranked in the lower quartile of the Philanthropy 400, closest to #1, scored higher on the incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni. The variables within incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were the opportunity for user response ($p = 0.046$), opportunity to send a postcard ($p = 0.033$), and availability of quizzes and games ($p = 0.005$).

There was also a positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$, where $p = 0.044$, between the total number of alumni on record and the composite “index score” for incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni. Those colleges and universities with a higher total of alumni on record also scored higher on the incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni. The variables within incorporation of a dialogic loop with alumni that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level were the opportunity to update contact information ($p = 0.011$) and the availability of quizzes and games ($p = 0.003$).

While these correlations do not imply a causal relationship, these correlations demonstrate that those colleges and universities scoring higher in the Philanthropy 400

ranking and those with a larger alumni base are more successfully incorporating a dialogic loop for alumni on their Web sites. The opportunity for user response, which was present in 81.1 percent of the sites, and the opportunity for alumni to update contact information, which was present in 85.9 percent of the sites, provides a feedback mechanism for alumni, the basis for a dialogic loop. The positive correlations on both these variables indicate that those organizations scoring higher in the Philanthropy 400 ranking also value a dialogic loop with alumni. Alumni are one of the most important publics for colleges and universities, and by fostering dialogue through the Web, this increased interaction contributes to a solid foundation of relationship-building with this important public. While few sites incorporated the interactive strategies such as sending a postcard (24.2 percent) or providing an opportunity to participate in quizzes and games (11.7 percent), the positive correlations for these variables also emphasize the projected benefit of incorporating interactivity on the Web. Entertaining and fun interactive strategies such as these generate interest and return visits. Providing the conditions for dialogue establishes a foundation and promotes increased interactivity, which is beneficial to organizations in building and maintaining relationships.

It was surprising and notable that 64.8 percent of the college and university Web sites included an opportunity for alumni to log in to their own e-mail or Web account. This level of personalized interaction gives the user a reason to return to the site again and again, thereby fostering a continuous dialogic loop and generating numerous return visits. For alumni, the benefit of having their own e-mail or Web account is a direct link to their college or university, and with their own e-mail account, an organizational domain that clearly identifies them as an alumnus in their e-mail address. Many of the

college and university sites utilized its users' only section, which required a login, to include access to exclusive discounts, a means to update personal information, register for upcoming events, to access an alumni publication and to submit Class Notes. This is an exciting trend for colleges and universities. The technical and financial resources that this type of interactivity requires is likely to have a strong return on invest in the future, as alumni give back to their college or university with financial and other types of support. These opportunities are truly mutually beneficial as alumni participation is likely to increase with this level of interactivity. Colleges and universities are investing their future in the returned benefits that are likely to be obtained from incorporating interactivity and dialogue.

The greatest room for improvement in the incorporation of a dialogic loop for alumni publics is in the incorporation of interactive strategies such as voting, surveys, polls, postcards, quizzes and games. Very few of the Web sites incorporated voting (7 percent), an opportunity to fill out a survey, poll or give an opinion on issue(s) (10.9 percent), an opportunity to send a postcard (24.2 percent), or to participate in quizzes and games (11.7 percent). These interactive strategies are an entertaining way to interact with alumni on the Web, and they encourage repeat visits. One reason that colleges and universities are not more widely incorporating these strategies could be attributed to time and resources. While these are fun for the user, they provide little benefit other than increased interactivity and a dialogic loop, and they take time and resources away from other ventures. It is possible that colleges and universities have selected and employed those dialogic loops that are more salient for alumni, rather than high input loops, such as postcards, quizzes and games, which may not have as high a return rate for alumni.

Room for improvement also was evident in the incorporation of a mechanism for alumni to request regular information updates from the organization; only 58.6 percent of the colleges and universities provided alumni this opportunity. The goal of public relations is to create and maintain relationships with its publics, and colleges and universities may be underutilizing the Web as a tool for providing timely information to educate, update and inform its alumni publics about the organization. Providing periodic updates to alumni can help to foster increased interaction, dialogue and stewardship.

Donors

The composite “index score” for a dialogic loop with donor publics had a mean value of 1.10 out of 8.00. The incorporation of a dialogic loop for donor publics was the worst incorporated dialogic characteristic. Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 15 Web sites (11.7 percent) did not score positively on any of the characteristics for a dialogic loop with donor publics; 70.3 percent scored positively on only one characteristic, and 96.9 percent scored positively on two or fewer characteristics. Only 4 Web sites scored positively on more than two of the eight characteristics for a dialogic loop with donor publics.

There was a negative correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$, where $p = 0.041$, between the college or university income and the composite “index score” for a dialogic loop with donors. Those colleges and universities with a higher income actually scored lower on the incorporation of a dialogic loop with donor publics. The variable that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level was the opportunity for a user response ($p = 0.023$). The higher the total income for the college or university, the less likely they were to provide an opportunity for user response for donors.

This is an unexpected correlation, because most of the college and university Web sites, 85.2 percent, offered an opportunity for donor user response, either by e-mail, bulletin, message or chat board. The negative correlation between income and donor user response is surprising, because it would be expected that those colleges and universities with a higher income would perform better on the Web, and thereby incorporate dialogic characteristics and donor user response to a greater extent. However, those higher income colleges and universities actually scored poorly on the incorporation of a dialogic loop and particularly, the opportunity for user response.

Though this correlation does not imply a causal relationship, this correlation suggests that the colleges and universities are not utilizing the Web as an opportunity for a dialogic loop with donors. While the colleges and universities provide useful information and indeed target donor publics to an extent, the Web is likely not the primary means to create dialogue with donors. In fact, donor publics are more frequently engaged in interpersonal communication with the organization's representatives who represent the fund-raising function. Therefore, Web-based communication is probably underutilized by colleges and universities, as these organizations prefer to interact with donors in a different, more personalized, one-on-one manner.

However, there is an opportunity to engage donors and potential donors on the Web by improving the conditions that establish a dialogic loop, as very infrequently were any other interactive opportunities utilized for donor publics. The organizational Web site offers a real advantage in reaching out to cultivate potential donors and build the pipeline for new donors. As the research suggests, interested parties are going online to find information about organizations (Howard, 2003, p. 41), and the World Wide Web when

used to its fullest potential can be a communication tool for interactivity to cultivate and build new relationships with donors and potential donors.

Only 10.9 percent included a way for donors to update their contact information, just 5.5 percent included an opportunity for donors to request regular information updates from the organization, and only 5.5 percent provided a mechanism for donors to log in to their own e-mail or Web account. Colleges and universities could work to improve this level of interactivity on the Web.

Providing a means for donors to update their contact information also keeps the organization informed of address, phone and contact changes, and this improves the college and university's ability to stay in touch with this important public. Updated contact information is likewise useful when soliciting donors by phone or mail; an updated contact list can improve user response as there are fewer wrong numbers and bad addresses. Colleges and universities can also incorporate an opportunity for donors to request regular information updates from the organization, which thereby fosters a continuous dialogue with this public on the Web. Providing information to donors that is both current and timely can help to keep donors connected, maintaining and further cultivating this relationship through interaction.

In addition, the level of personalized interaction between colleges and universities can be greatly improved through the incorporation of an opportunity for donors to log into their own e-mail or Web account. Web accounts can provide donors the opportunity to track their gift information and history, update contact information and register for events, among many other things. This level of personalized interaction gives the user a reason to return to the site again and again, thereby fostering a continuous dialogic loop

and generating numerous return visits. Colleges and universities have incorporated this characteristic somewhat extensively for alumni, and this is an exciting opportunity for colleges and universities to do the same for their donor publics. These opportunities are truly mutually beneficial as donor participation is likely to increase with this level of interactivity as well.

Similar to the incorporation of a dialogic loop for alumni, colleges and universities very infrequently utilized interactive strategies such as postcards, surveys, polls, quizzes or games. None of the Web sites offered an opportunity for donors to send a postcard; only one site offered an opportunity to vote or fill out a survey, poll, or give an opinion on issue(s), and only two Web sites included an opportunity to participate in quizzes or games for donor publics. There is great room for improvement in this area, and these strategies provide entertainment, opportunities for interaction with donors, and generate return visits. However, universally in this study, these opportunities were lacking and could be attributed to the lack of a need for entertainment on college and university Web sites as well as a lack of time and resources required to design and maintain these strategies.

Online giving

Online giving is a Web-based tool that is unique to nonprofit organizations. This Web-based tool offers opportunities for interactivity, including the ability to secure donations as well as to assist in the relationship-building process between organizations and publics. Online giving provides an opportunity for interactivity that has not been previously discussed in the literature. It provides a transactional interaction between the organization and its donors and establishes the conditions for dialogue and two-way

communication. It could serve as a first step to open the door for increased interaction between a nonprofit organization and its publics.

The composite “index score” for online giving features as a component of a dialogic loop with donor publics had a mean value of 8.47 on a scale of 0 to 14, which garnered the sixth best incorporated dialogic characteristic. While none of the sites scored positively on all 14 characteristics, 35.2 percent scored positively on 10 or more of the characteristics.

Of the 128 college and university Web sites, 91.4 percent of the sites included an online donation option for donor publics, demonstrating that there is widespread incorporation of online giving. Within those that included an online donation option, 90.6 percent offered a credit card payment option; 18 percent offered an electronic check method; 35.2 percent included a mail-in-form for donations; and 60.2 percent offered a telephone number to call in donations. There is clearly an opportunity to expand the payment options that donors have when making a contribution online, and by including more payment options, colleges and universities are more inclusive of the variety of donor needs. Some donors may prefer not to submit a donation online, but would rather fill out an online form to mail, or even call in their donation. Relying heavily on online credit card transactions, may cause organizations to miss out on those donor publics who do not use credit cards, and while most organizations indeed have a telephone number to call in gifts, it was surprising that only 60 percent included that information in their online giving section.

Remarkably, less than 70 percent (60.95 percent) of the sites included a message about the online donation option operating on a “Secure” Web site. It is important to

include this type of information to reassure users that the information they provide is confidential, encrypted and ultimately safe on the Web (*Corporate Philanthropy Report*, 2004, p. 5). While almost all of the sites indeed operated their online giving transactions on a secure server, the key is to highlight this information so that donors and potential donors are aware and can easily find it.

In addition, only 32.8 percent of the college and university Web sites included a frequently asked questions section about donations. It is likewise important to be proactive in providing opportunities for dialogue that could help donors with their decision-making process. Questions might deal with who handles the gift, how the gift is processed and deposited, what IRS rules govern charitable contributions, and how to contact someone with a question, among others. Providing a frequently-asked-questions section can help colleges and universities to establish the conditions for dialogue and provide valuable information for donor publics.

It was disappointing that although almost 80 percent (78.1 percent) of the college and university sites clearly identified a way of contacting the organization for donations, only 53.1 percent included a name, 60.2 percent included a title, and 77.3 percent included an address, while 94.5 percent of the sites included a phone number, and 93.8 percent included an e-mail address. The college and university Web sites scored similarly in the media usefulness of information section when providing contact information, so it was not so much surprising, as unrewarding online behavior. Donors and potential donors need to be provided with the name and title of someone from the organization that can assist them with their donation online in case there are questions or problems with the site. In addition, many donations are still submitted to the organization through more

traditional channels such as mail, so it is beneficial for the organization to include their address. The lack of contact information available online reveals a very asymmetrical organizational standpoint, and it does not contribute to building or maintaining mutually beneficial relationships, or fostering dialogue with donors. In addition, colleges and universities may actually miss out on donations by not providing contact information such as this.

The opportunity to utilize interactivity through online giving is already present as is evident in the more than 90 percent of colleges and universities who provide an option for online giving. This provides a dialogic loop through which nonprofit organizations can communicate and further develop this relationship. However, there is room for significant improvement in incorporating useful tools such as frequently asked questions, highlighting the security of online giving and providing clearly identified contact information.

The opportunity to make a gift online offers a transactional interaction between the donor and the organization, and the opportunity for two-way communication is ever present after a gift is made. By providing online giving opportunities as a first step, organizations are opening the door for increased interaction with their donor publics.

Conservation of Visitors

Conservation of visitors is defined as “stickiness” and timeliness, characteristics that encourage visitors to remain or stay on the organization’s Web site (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 331). On a scale of 0 to 4, the college and university sites had a mean score of 2.47 on the incorporation of conservation of visitors, which made it the fourth best incorporated dialogic characteristic.

There was a positive correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level, where $p = 0.026$, between total dollars received in private support and the composite “index score” for conservation of visitors. Those colleges and universities that received more dollars in private support also obtained a higher composite score on conservation of visitors. The variable within conservation of visitors that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level, where $p = 0.035$, was the opportunity for users to subscribe for regular information updates.

Likewise, there was a negative correlation, significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, where $p = 0.012$, between the quartile for Philanthropy 400 rank and the composite “index score” for conservation of visitors. Those college and university Web sites that scored higher on conservation of visitors scored in the lower quartile of the Philanthropy 400 rank, meaning they scored in the quartile with the rank closest to number one. Also, the variable within conservation of visitors that contributed significantly to this correlation at the $p \leq 0.05$ level, where $p = 0.020$, was the opportunity for users to subscribe for regular information updates.

While a causal relationship was not implied by these correlations, both of these correlations demonstrate that those colleges and universities raising more in private support, and thereby scoring higher in the Philanthropy 400 ranking, are utilizing their Web sites to build and maintain relationships by incorporating the dialogic characteristic of conservation of visitors. Providing the opportunity for regular information updates via the Web helps organizations to foster a relationship and a dialogue with its publics. It is important to engage visitors the first time they visit a Web site by providing information that is both current and timely, and organizations that provide users with the opportunity

to receive regular information updates are cultivating and building a relationship through this interaction. Incorporating conservation of visitors on the Web demonstrates that the public relations function is at the heart of driving this interaction by utilizing the Web as a communication tool to provide timely, pertinent information.

The college and university sites scored best within conservation of visitors on the inclusion of news stories or public information that had been updated within the last 30 days; almost 97 percent of the sites included recently updated news stories or information. Web sites that have continually updated and valuable information “appear credible and suggest that an organization is responsible” (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 329). Likewise, this shows that the public relations function is utilizing this medium to provide timely information to its publics, and there is indeed value to updating this information regularly. By maintaining the timeliness of news on the Web, public relations practitioners are also maintaining the organization’s relationship with its publics, thereby increasing the “stickiness” of the site and encouraging repeat visitors.

The majority of the Web sites, 82.8 percent, loaded in less than one second from average speed, networked computers, and the mean value for loading speed was 1.15 seconds. This demonstrates that as the Web has evolved into a frequently used communication tool, organizations have mastered the construction and development of Web sites. The speed in which the Home page loads contributes to conserving visitors on the site and engaging them to remain on the site, whereby, users can seamlessly navigate and are not delayed by slow functioning Home pages.

In addition, most of the Web sites, 86.7 percent, included only links belonging to the organization on the Home page. Visitors should be engaged to remain on the Web

site, and not wander off following outside links. If a “visitor leaves your site on an external link, he/she may never get back” (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 331). Just 13.3 percent included outside links not belonging to the organization on the Home page, which indicates that organizations understand the importance of “stickiness” and develop their sites to include only essential links within the organization.

There is, however, great room for improvement in conservation of visitors as more than 40 percent of the college and university sites scored positively on only two of the four characteristics. Just 50 percent of the sites offered an opportunity for users to subscribe for regular information updates from the organization. The goal of public relations is to create and maintain relationships with publics, and by utilizing the Web as a tool to engage its publics, this medium offers a mechanism for timely information, an opportunity for increased interaction and stewardship with an organization’s publics. This principle follows Buber’s suggestion that “dialogic communication should be the goal of the interaction and not merely a means to an end such as marketing or advertising” (p. 331). As is evident from the correlations presented in this section, organizations that score higher in the Philanthropy 400 and raise more in private support are also utilizing regular information updates to cultivate and maintain relationships with its publics.

In addition, very few of the college and university Web sites, only 13.3 percent, included the time and date the site was last updated on the Home page. While it is important to continually update and provide timely information via the Web to conserve visitors, perhaps the inclusion of the time and date the site was last updated on the Home page has become passé and is no longer utilized by Web designers. Almost all of the sites, 98 percent, indeed included news stories or information that had been updated in

the last 30 days, so the inclusion of a time/date stamp for last update on the Home page, may not have been an accurate variable to determine timeliness or conservation of visitors.

Generation of Return Visits

The principles of generation of return visits and conservation of visitors go hand-in-hand. Conservation of visitors establishes the conditions that encourage return visitors. Organizations genuinely want visitors to return to their Web site on a regular basis, or they would not devote the necessary resources to their Web sites in the first place. On a scale of 0 to 6, the composite “index score” for generation of return visits had a mean value of 3.13, scoring as the third worst incorporated dialogic characteristic.

The college and university Web sites scored well on the inclusion of downloadable information, question and answer forums or frequently asked questions, and a calendar of events, further demonstrating the benefit of the Web as a communication tool for information dissemination. In addition, all 128 Web sites included downloadable information, such as PDF files. Providing timely information of value to its publics and tools such as this encourages repeat visits, and it is an “easy way for public relations practitioners to create the conditions for dialogic relationships” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 329).

A majority of the Web sites, 97.7 percent, included a calendar of events, and most of the Web sites, 94.5 percent, included question and answer forums or frequently asked questions as well. It is important to keep publics informed of events that may be of interest, and being able to return to the Web site at any time to explore campus happenings is valuable in generating return visits. Also by providing question and answer forums or frequently asked questions, the organization is being proactive in its dialogue

with publics and also encouraging return visits. The principle of generation of return visits is an important function of relationship building, because “relationships are not established in one-contact communication interactions” (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001, p. 270).

Very few college or university sites, only 25 of the 128, included the interactive opportunities such as postcards, polls, quizzes, surveys or games. Interactive strategies such as these are entertaining and fun for the user, which encourages repeat visits. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, college and university Web sites consistently scored low on these entertaining, interactive opportunities also in the donor and alumni dialogic loop sections. It stands to reason that colleges and universities simply may decide not to invest their time or resources in this type of interactivity.

There is sufficient room for improving the incorporation of the dialogic characteristic, generation of return visits, specifically in the inclusion of a statement that invites visitors to return and a statement that encourages visitors to bookmark the site. Only two of the 128 college and university Web sites included an explicit statement that invited visitors to return, while none of the sites included a statement that encouraged visitors to bookmark the site. While Kent, Taylor and White (1998, 2001) advocated the use of these statements, in both of their studies of activist and nonprofit organizations, very few Web sites actually included either of these statements. Perhaps the inclusion of these statements is not actually a common practice in Web design, nor an accurate measurement of generating return visits. From a public relations viewpoint, including these statements on the Web site could actually distract from the message and the content of the page that the user is viewing, specifically on the Home page where these

statements could actually crowd the useful links and important navigation features. While including these statements can likely generate return visits, the evidence that very few colleges and universities are actually doing so suggests that other variables within generating return visits are more viable.

Targeting and Engaging Publics in Dialogue

At the heart of public relations is building relationships, and likewise, the World Wide Web is a communication tool for public relations practitioners to utilize in building and maintaining relationships with their various publics. The colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400 targeted a number of varied publics on the Home pages of their Web sites, and seemed to seek to engage these publics in dialogue. Media, students and alumni were the top three publics targeted on the Home pages of colleges and university Web sites.

The media and students were the most frequently targeted publics on the Home pages of the 128 college and university Web sites; both of these publics were targeted on 96.9 percent of the Web sites. It was not surprising that the media was one of the primary publics targeted on the Home page. The media is an important public to colleges and universities because it helps build awareness of the institution by disseminating information to the general and more targeted public, the media publishes significant research findings from colleges and universities, and the media utilizes experts and sources from colleges and universities. The media and colleges or universities participate in a mutually beneficial relationship with one another, as the media seeks to provide information to the public, it relies on organizations for story ideas, sources and cooperation, and organizations utilize the media to reach its public relations goals by disseminating information. A successful relationship with the media can help an

organization to present a credible image to the public, demonstrate accountability and shelter itself from the inevitability of negative press. It is in these colleges and universities best interest to target this important public and also seek to provide the media with useful information, and as the results of this study show, colleges and universities are indeed targeting this important public and providing useful information to the media, however, with some room for improvement.

Students are also one of the most important publics to a college or university as they are its customers, the recipients of an education provided by the institution, its future alumni and potential donors. It is not surprising, that 96.9 percent of the Web sites targeted students, because it is very important that colleges and universities engage this public early and frequently. Cultivating a relationship early in students' college careers can pay great dividends for the organization in the future. This relationship is also mutually beneficial as students receive an education, and colleges and universities generate income from students' tuition. By targeting students and potential students on the Web, colleges and universities establish the foundation for dialogue with this important public, and through increased interaction, these organizations are likely to reap the benefits of a relationship with these publics. Current students also become alumni, and if they have a successful relationship with the college or university during their education, they are more likely to become engaged, participate and contribute to the organization's success, even after graduation.

Alumni publics were targeted on 96.10 percent of the college and university Web sites, garnering the third most frequently targeted public on the Home page of these sites. Alumni are such an important public to the college or university's future; they are its

foundation, advocates for their alma mater, and many times they become its strongest financial supporters. By targeting alumni on the Home page, these colleges and universities are cultivating dialogue and interaction with this public. It is important for colleges and universities to maintain this relationship and establish a strong base of supporters, whether financial or otherwise, and what better public than alumni, former students who have experienced first-hand the benefits provided by this organization.

Faculty and staff of colleges and universities were the fourth most frequently targeted public on the organization's Home page. More than 78 percent of the sites targeted faculty and staff. This public is extremely important to the organization's success as they are its employees and representatives of the college or university through the role in which they work for the institution. There is some room for improvement in targeting faculty and staff on the Home page; however, it should be noted that many organizations utilize an intranet site for employees, which may not be accessible via the Home page, and could contribute to a lower percentage of colleges and universities targeting this public on the Home page.

It was surprising that donors came in at the fifth most targeted public with just 73.40 percent of the sites targeting donors on the Home page. Colleges and universities have a tremendous opportunity to drive donations through online giving by targeting donors on the Home page, and there is indeed a great deal of room for improvement in targeting donors. By simply incorporating a button to make an online gift or a statement that encourages supporting the organization, colleges and universities can facilitate ease of use for donor publics and promote giving to the organization.

While it is likely that all of the colleges and universities have employment opportunities, only 63.3 percent of the Web sites targeted job seekers on the Home page. Job seekers frequently turn to the Web for information on employment opportunities, and it is important that they can easily find it. Encouraging dialogue and interaction with potential employees is an area in which the Web offers numerous opportunities, and colleges and universities clearly have room for improvement in targeting job seekers and providing useful information that is accessible via the Home page.

Colleges and universities have countless visitors to campus and to the Web, be they sports fans, potential students or employees, alumni, the media, members of the community or otherwise; however, visitors were targeted on only 58.60 percent of the Home pages of college and university Web sites. If an individual or group is seeking to visit a university, it is beneficial for this public to be able to locate information that is useful for a visit, including a map, locations of interest, a guide to the college or university etc. By targeting visitors on the Home page, colleges and universities can encourage dialogue with this public, interact with interested parties, and facilitate visitors' ease of use in finding information.

Several publics were targeted on less than 50 percent of the Web sites: parents were targeted on just 45.30 percent of college and university Web sites; the community was targeted on only 44.50 percent of the sites; friends were targeted on less than 35 percent of the Web sites, and companies or organizations interested in career placement opportunities were targeted on just 14.10 percent of the sites. These publics are all important to the organization's success. Parents encourage their children to attend the institution and are active in their children's education. The community in which a college

or university resides is an active partner in the education process, and colleges or universities are often dependent on the community for influential community leaders' support as well as the communities' resources: economical, financial, educational, and legislative resources, among others. Friends of the university contribute their time, volunteer efforts, and many times their finances to the organization. In addition, most colleges and universities are active in recruiting efforts for their students, which highlights the partnership between companies and organizations interested in career placement opportunities. While these publics were less frequently targeted on the Home pages of colleges and universities, it is clearly evident that establishing and maintaining a relationship with these publics is an important effort, and the Web offers a mechanism to promote dialogue, interactivity and disseminate information to these publics.

Trustees (2.40 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.98$) and legislators (2.30 percent; $\bar{M} = 1.98$) were very infrequently targeted on the Home pages of college and university Web sites. These two publics are composed of a very small number of members, who are very important to the organization's success, which makes them more likely candidates for interpersonal communication tactics than for targeted mass communication through the organization's Web site. However, even though these two publics are probably frequently engaged in interpersonal communication with representatives of the organization, providing important information online through the college or university Web site also has its benefits including ease of accessing the Web, timeliness of information dissemination, and increased interaction.

Colleges and universities are utilizing their Web sites to target publics and engage them in dialogue. The variety of publics targeted on the Home pages of these

organizations demonstrates the usefulness of the Web in cultivating dialogue and providing targeted information for publics.

Public vs. Private Universities

This study was conducted utilizing those colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400, and the ranking included 57 private and 71 public colleges or universities. The Web sites of public colleges or universities scored higher on the incorporation of characteristics of dialogic communication. The total composite “index score” for the incorporation of dialogic characteristics for public college or university Web sites was 47.68 of 79.00, while the composite “index score” for private institutions was 45.12 of 79.00. In a t-test for equality of means, the difference was significant (2-tailed) between public or private institutions where $p \leq 0.05$ for the total composite “index score” of the incorporation of dialogic characteristics ($p = 0.027$). While public college or university Web sites obtained a higher mean score on all nine sections in this study for the incorporation of characteristics of dialogic communication, the mean difference in a t-test for equality of means was significant (2-tailed) where $p \leq 0.05$ for the incorporation of ease of interface ($p = 0.048$), usefulness of information to alumni ($p = 0.05$), a dialogic loop for alumni (0.049), and a dialogic loop for donors ($p = 0.016$).

Public colleges or universities are more successfully incorporating dialogic characteristics than private colleges or universities, particularly those characteristics that incorporate ease of interface, usefulness of information to alumni, a dialogic loop for alumni and a dialogic loop for donors. It is interesting to note that public colleges or universities had more than double the average total number of alumni on record ($\underline{M} = 169,662$) than private colleges or universities ($\underline{M} = 78,808$). The size and reach of public colleges and universities when it comes to their alumni base is much greater than private

colleges or universities, and this could be a factor in how successful public colleges or universities have been in incorporating dialogic characteristics. Because private colleges or universities are utilizing the Web to target a greater number of alumni, they may rely more heavily on their Web site as a communication tool, thereby incorporating more features encouraging ease of use, more useful information for alumni, and more interactive features and a dialogic loop for both alumni and donors.

Private college or university Web sites obtained a higher mean score when targeting diverse publics on the Home page. The Web sites of private colleges and universities obtained a higher mean score and more frequently targeted all 14 publics examined in this study: alumni, community, companies or organizations interested in career placement, donors, faculty/staff, friends, job seekers, legislators, media, parents, students, trustees and visitors. However, in a t-test for equality of means, the difference was significant (2-tailed) between public or private institutions where $p \leq 0.05$ only when targeting friends ($p = 0.05$) on the Home page. Private colleges or universities are more successfully targeting publics on the Home page than public colleges or universities, specifically friends. This could be attributed to the fact that private colleges or universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 obtained a higher amount of private support and had income and expenses almost double that of public colleges or universities in the Philanthropy 400. Because private colleges or universities are securing more in private support, and therefore have greater income and expenses, they are more frequently targeting the various publics that attribute to this difference. Indeed, the targeted public: friends, encompasses donors, volunteers, advocates and more, and these are all essential to the amount of private support obtained.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

This study provides an exploratory prescription for building more effective Web sites by examining the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web for the nonprofit sector. This study found that colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400 had significant room for improvement in incorporating dialogic characteristics on their Web sites. The college and university Web sites performed the best on integrating ease of interface characteristics and the characteristics of usefulness of information for both alumni and donor publics. However, the sites performed the worst on incorporating a dialogic loop for both alumni and donor publics and characteristics to generate return visits.

The colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400 appear to be utilizing their Web sites as more of an information resource. These organizations are providing a Web site that is easy to use with information targeted to its diverse publics. Nevertheless, colleges and universities are underutilizing their Web sites for feedback and interactive opportunities with their publics.

The results of this study imply that colleges and universities' use of the Web as a communication tool are more asymmetrical than symmetrical, and reflects the asymmetrical model of public information (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The public information model represents the practice of public relations as more of a journalistic function, disseminating accurate, favorable information about the organization. Colleges and universities should strive to use their Web sites as an interactive communication tool

that encourages and establishes the foundation for dialogue. By striving for a more two-way symmetrical model of communication, these organizations can use their Web sites for dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviors of both the organization and its publics (Heath, 2001, p. 58).

The number of correlations that were apparent in the results of this study underscores the usefulness of the Web as a communication tool to provide information and to cultivate and maintain relationships with an organization's publics. There were positive correlations between total dollars received in private support and the composite "index score" for usefulness of information to the media, usefulness of information to alumni, and conservation of visitors. While these correlations do not imply a causal relationship, those colleges and universities that secure more dollars in private support and are more successful in their fund-raising efforts are also performing well on the Web in key areas such as conserving visitors on the site and providing useful information to media and alumni publics.

In addition, there were negative correlations between the quartile for Philanthropy 400 rank and the composite "index score" for usefulness of information to the media, usefulness of information to alumni, incorporation of a dialogic loop for alumni, and conservation of visitors. While not implying causality, those colleges and universities that scored in the Philanthropy 400 quartile with the rank closest to number one and were therefore, more successful in their fund-raising efforts, were also successful in incorporating several key features of dialogic communication on the Web, including providing useful information for both alumni and the media, incorporating a dialogic loop for alumni, and conserving visitors on the Web.

In addition, there was a positive correlation between the total number of alumni on record and the composite “index score” for usefulness of information to alumni and the incorporation of a dialogic loop for alumni. Though these correlations do not imply causality, these correlations demonstrate that those colleges and universities with a larger number of alumni on record are utilizing their Web sites to provide useful information to their alumni and incorporating a dialogic loop to cultivate, maintain, and provide stewardship to this important public. The key to these correlations is the size, reach and breadth of the colleges and universities performing at their best on the Web. Colleges and universities are doing an excellent job of incorporating a number of characteristics that foster dialogue with alumni publics through useful information dissemination on their Web sites. In addition, colleges and universities with a larger alumni base demonstrate through these correlations, though not causal, that they value a dialogic loop with alumni. Alumni are one of the most important publics for colleges and universities, as they often become a college or university’s strongest financial supporters, and by fostering dialogue through the Web, this increased interaction contributes to a solid foundation of relationship-building with this important public. Perhaps, the wealthier and larger colleges and universities with a broader alumni base have more income to spend on expansive Web design, however even abundant resources must still be applied within priorities, and these schools seem to have given priority to incorporating useful features and a dialogic loop for their alumni.

This study also found that there was widespread integration of online giving, however, there was room for significant improvement in incorporating useful tools such as frequently asked questions, highlighting the security of online giving and providing

clearly identified contact information. Colleges and universities are indeed utilizing online giving as a communication tool to encourage interactivity and drive donations, but within this process they are lacking in key features that encourage dialogue.

Lastly, this study found that colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400 are utilizing their Web sites to target diverse publics and engage them in dialogue. The variety of publics targeted on the Home pages of these organizations demonstrates the usefulness of the Web in cultivating dialogue and providing targeted information for publics. Most frequently, the sites targeted media, alumni and students, while donors ranked in at the fifth most frequently targeted public following faculty and staff. By targeting publics on the Home page, colleges and universities can encourage dialogue, interact with these publics, and facilitate ease of use in finding information.

Contributions

There are three primary contributions of this study to the field of public relations. First, this study incorporated Kent, Taylor and White's (1998, 2001, 2003) previous research on the five principles of dialogic communication to examine the relationship-building function of the World Wide Web for the nonprofit sector. Kent and Taylor detailed five principles as guidelines for the "successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 327-334).

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship-building use of the World Wide Web by one type of nonprofit organization – colleges and universities. This study examined the use of Web sites by colleges and universities to determine the extent to which they used effective dialogue to build organization-public relationships. Importantly, this is the first study of its kind that focused specifically on nonprofit

organizations to determine how these organizations are building and maintaining relationships through their Web sites.

Secondly, this is the first study of its kind that has examined online giving as a form of interaction, a characteristic of a dialogic loop with donor publics. This study determined the extent to which the characteristics of online giving are utilized as a form of interaction. Online giving is a Web-based tool that is unique to nonprofit organizations. Online giving offers opportunities for interactivity, including the ability to secure donations as well as to assist in the relationship-building process between organizations and publics. While there have been several surveys (Austin, 2001; Larose, 2003; Wallace, 2001b; Wallace, 2002; Wallace, 2003; Wallace, 2004b) reporting the dollar totals for online donations, this is the first study that has explored online giving as a relationship-building tool on nonprofit organizations' Web sites.

Lastly, this study determined with which publics these nonprofit organizations are seeking to engage in dialogue through the use of their Web site. At the heart of public relations is building relationships, and the World Wide Web is a communication tool for public relations practitioners to utilize in building and maintaining relationships with various publics. This study was the first of its kind to determine with which publics colleges and universities attempted to engage in dialogue on the Web.

Limitations

As with any research study, there are some limitations of the study and opportunities for research that should be noted. The sample for this study was compiled from the 129 colleges and universities represented in the Philanthropy 400, which ranks the top 400 nonprofit organizations based on fund-raising totals for the previous fiscal year. The data may not be representative of typical colleges and universities. Because

these organizations have the highest dollar amount in private support, and likewise a higher total income, these organizations may have more resources to invest in their Web sites. The sample is not representative of all colleges and universities in the United States, and therefore these results cannot be extrapolated to a larger population other than those colleges and universities in the Philanthropy 400.

In addition, the findings of this particular content analysis are limited to the framework of the categories and definitions used in this analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991, p. 160). In order to minimize this limitation, the categories and characteristics were precisely defined; however, the study's results are based solely on those definitions used in the analysis.

Lastly, while this study was able to identify and examine those characteristics of dialogue on the Web that establish a foundation for dialogic communication, this study was unable to examine the responsiveness of the organization. It is equally important to note that offering these features alone does not constitute a dialogic loop, organizations must actually respond to complete the dialogic loop and engage in two-way communication.

Opportunities for Research

There is very little research that investigates the use of the World Wide Web as a communication tool for the nonprofit sector. While this study provides an exploratory prescription for building more effective Web sites, future studies need to test the results of this study, perhaps by focusing on more functional areas for nonprofits, such as donor and alumni relations on the Web. In addition, there is a great opportunity to study a number of different subsections of the nonprofit sector as well, for example, environmental, international, social services, or health organizations, and examine

publics specific to each of these subsections. As the results of this study demonstrated, colleges and universities are using the Web to reach their alumni, so a number of variables could be added to this study in the future to provide rich context in the characteristics of alumni, such as the mean age of alumni, average gift size of online donations by alumni, and average gift size for alumni by any means, traditional or online.

This research study provides a benchmark for analysis, and future research studies can replicate the study using the same categories and definitions to undertake a longitudinal study. After a period of time has passed, the study could be replicated to determine if Web sites have changed or improved.

While this study utilized the Philanthropy 400 as the sampling frame, in a future research study, a more generalized, representative sample of colleges or universities could be studied, such as a simple random sample of all colleges and universities, or even research universities, such as the Association of American Universities.

Lastly, one of limitation's of this study's was not being able to examine the responsiveness of the organization. An opportunity for future research could include observation of an organization's responsiveness to inquiries and feedback. Areas of focus in responsiveness could include examining how nonprofit organizations complete a dialogic loop after an online gift is made, or, whether or not organizations respond to feedback through a "Contact us" link on the Web or by e-mail.

APPENDIX A
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES REPRESENTED IN THE PHILANTHROPY 400

A-1. Colleges and Universities Represented in the Philanthropy 400

Rank	Organization
10	Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.)
13	Stanford University (Calif.)
20	University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)
22	University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
26	The Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore)
27	University of California at Los Angeles
28	Cornell University (Ithaca, N.Y.)
29	University of Washington (Seattle)
30	University of Texas at Austin
31	University of Southern California (Los Angeles)
33	Duke University (Durham, N.C.)
34	University of Wisconsin at Madison
36	Columbia University (New York)
38	Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering (Needham, Mass.)
39	University of Virginia (Charlottesville)
40	Indiana University (Bloomington)
42	University of Minnesota (Minneapolis)
45	Princeton University (N.J.)
47	University of California at San Francisco
48	Yale University (New Haven, Conn.)
50	New York University
52	Ohio State University (Columbus)
56	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge)
57	University of California at Berkeley
61	University of Arizona (Tucson)
62	University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)
63	Pennsylvania State University (University Park)
65	University of Florida (Gainesville)
66	Northwestern University (Evanston, Ill.)
72	University of Illinois (Urbana)
74	Texas A&M University (College Station)
76	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
77	University of Chicago
90	University of California-San Diego (La Jolla)
91	University of Utah (Salt Lake City)
106	California Institute of Technology (Pasadena)
109	Emory University (Atlanta)

Table A-1. Continued

Rank	Organization
110	North Carolina State University (Raleigh)
113	University of Tennessee System (Knoxville)
115	Michigan State University (East Lansing)
118	University of Notre Dame (South Bend, Ind.)
121	Washington University in St. Louis
128	Purdue University (West Lafayette, Ind.)
129	Boston University
137	University of Colorado (Boulder)
139	Vanderbilt University (Nashville)
141	University of Pittsburgh
143	University of Nebraska (Lincoln)
145	University of Iowa (Iowa City)
146	Rutgers University (New Brunswick, N.J.)
147	University of Miami (Coral Gables, Fla.)
152	Dartmouth College (Hanover, N.H.)
154	University of Oklahoma (Norman)
161	University of Kansas (Lawrence)
162	Georgetown University (Washington)
166	Brown University (Providence, R.I.)
173	State University of New York at Stony Brook
176	Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland)
179	University of Maryland at College Park
185	Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta)
191	Brandeis University (Waltham, Mass.)
194	Brigham Young University (Provo, Utah)
195	Tufts University (Medford, Mass.)
202	University of Missouri at Columbia
203	University of California at Davis
208	Arizona State University (Tempe)
209	Florida State University (Tallahassee)
211	University of Oregon (Eugene)
212	University of California at Santa Barbara
220	University of Rochester (N.Y.)
221	George Washington University (Washington)
222	University of Georgia (Athens)
224	Drexel University (Philadelphia)
225	Rice University (Houston)
234	University of Kentucky (Lexington)
235	Wellesley College (Mass.)
236	Boston College (Chestnut Hill, Mass.)
239	Virginia Tech (Blacksburg)
243	Rockefeller University (New York)
245	University of California at Irvine
251	University of Mississippi (Oxford)
253	Tulane University (New Orleans)
256	University of Alabama at Birmingham

Table A-1. Continued

Rank	Organization
259	University of Cincinnati
260	University of South Carolina at Columbia
267	Baylor University (Waco, Tex.)
269	Washington State University (Pullman)
279	Iowa State University (Ames)
286	University of Massachusetts at Lowell
291	Auburn University (Ala.)
292	Kansas State University (Manhattan)
293	Old Dominion University (Norfolk, Va.)
297	Moody Bible Institute (Chicago)
298	College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, Va.)
299	Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh)
300	San Diego State University
302	University of Maryland at Baltimore
303	Trinity College (Hartford, Conn)
309	University of Connecticut (Storrs)
314	West Virginia University (Morgantown)
322	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, N.Y.)
326	University of New Mexico (Albuquerque)
331	Columbus State University (Ga.)
332	Oklahoma State University (Stillwater)
333	Smith College (Northampton, Mass.)
338	Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology (Terre Haute, Ind.)
342	State University of New York Cornell Statutory Colleges (Ithaca)
343	Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles)
345	Southern Methodist University (Dallas)
349	Syracuse University (N.Y.)
350	Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond)
355	Yeshiva University (New York)
356	DePauw University (Greencastle, Ind.)
360	Ball State University (Muncie, Ind.)
361	Clemson University (S.C.)
364	University of Houston
365	State University of New York at Albany
373	Williams College (Williamstown, Mass.)
375	University of Massachusetts at Amherst
378	University of Denver
386	Mississippi State University
388	Oklahoma City University
389	University of Delaware (Newark)
390	Fordham University (New York)
395	Valparaiso University (Ind.)
397	State University of New York at Buffalo
398	University of Louisville (Ky.)
399	Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)
400	Loma Linda University (Calif.)

APPENDIX B
CODING INSTRUMENT

Survey # _____

Name of Organization:

Web address (attach home page):

Date and time evaluated:

_____ MM/DD/YY 00:00 a.m. or p.m. _____

DIALOGIC FEATURES

**1. Ease of Interface
(6 characteristics)**

- 1-1 Site map or Web directory on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-2 Major links to rest of site on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-3 Search engine or search engine box on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-4 Logo of organization on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-5 Heavy graphic reliance? **Yes/No**
- 1-6 Information is accessible with images turned off? **Yes/No**

**2. Timeliness of Information (Conservation of Visitors)
(5 characteristics)**

Time Home page takes to load? (Try same time everyday for 5 days):

2-1 Day One Seconds: _____

2-2 Last updated time and date on Home page? **Yes/No** _____

2-2b: Month/Date/Yr MM/DD/YY

2-3 News stories or public information within last 30 days? **Yes/No**

2-4 Can a user subscribe for regular information via e-mail? **Yes/No**

2-5 Outside links (not belonging to the organization) on the Home page? **Yes/No**

3. Generation of Return Visits (6 characteristics)

- 3-1 Explicit statement invites visitors to return? **Yes/No**
- 3-2 "Bookmark Now" statement **Yes/No**
- 3-3 Q & As/FAQs? **Yes/No**
- 3-4 Calendar of events? **Yes/No**
- 3-5 Downloadable information—PDF files etc? **Yes/No**
- 3-6 Interactive opportunities (polls, quizzes, surveys, games, e-postcards)? **Yes/No**

4. Which publics are targeted by name on the Home page?

- 4-1 Alumni **Yes/No**
- 4-2 Community **Yes/No**
- 4-3 Companies/Organizations interested in Career Placement **Yes/No**
- 4-4 Donors **Yes/No**
- 4-5 Faculty/Staff **Yes/No**
- 4-6 Friends **Yes/No**
- 4-7 Job Seekers **Yes/No**
- 4-8 Legislators **Yes/No**
- 4-9 Media **Yes/No**
- 4-10 Parents **Yes/No**
- 4-11 Students **Yes/No**
- 4-12 Trustees **Yes/No**
- 4-13 Visitors **Yes/No**
- 4-14 Patients **Yes/No**
- 4-15 Other _____

5. Media publics – Usefulness of Information (19 characteristics)

- 5-1: Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**
If No, then move to question 5-2.
If Yes, skip to 5-3.
- 5-2: Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**
- 5-3: Press releases? **Yes/No**
- 5-4 Archive? **Yes/No**
If Yes, move to question 5-5.
If No, then move to question 5-7.
- 5-5 Time-length of archive? _____**Months**
- 5-6 Organized by? **Chronological/Topical**
- 5-7 Speeches? **Yes/No**
- 5-8 Biographical Information? **Yes/No**
- 5-9 Philosophy/Mission statement? **Yes/No**
- 5-10 Downloadable graphics? **Yes/No**
- 5-11 Audio or video clips? **Yes/No**

- 5-12 Clearly Identified Media Contact? **Yes/No**
 5-13 Name? **Yes/No**
 5-14 Title? **Yes/No**
 5-15 Address? **Yes/No**
 5-16 Phone? **Yes/No**
 5-17 E-mail? **Yes/No**
 5-18 News Forums? **Yes/No**
 5-19 Listing of experts/sources for the media to search/identify potential sources? **Yes/No**

**6. Alumni Publics – Usefulness of Information
 (13 characteristics)**

- 6-1 Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**
 If Yes, move to question 6-3.
 If No, then move to question 6-2.
 6-2 Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**
 6-3 How to become affiliated/get involved? **Yes/No**
 6-4 How to contribute money? **Yes/No**
 6-5 Alumni magazine/publication? **Yes/No**
 6-6 Notes about each class (Class Notes)? **Yes/No**
 6-7 Alumni/Membership Group? **Yes/No**
 If Yes, then move to question 6-8.
 If No, then move to 6-10.
 6-8 Benefits? **Yes/No**
 6-9 Online signup? **Yes/No**
 6-10 Calendar of alumni events? **Yes/No**
 6-11 Job opportunities? **Yes/No**
 6-12 Alumni travel opportunities? **Yes/No**
 6-13 Online merchandise/shopping? **Yes/No**

**7. Alumni Publics –Interactivity (Dialogic Loop)
 (8 characteristics)**

- 7-1 Opportunity for user response (e-mail/bulletin/message/chat board)? **Yes/No**
 7-2 Opportunity to sign up for regular information updates? **Yes/No**
 7-3 Opportunity to update contact information? **Yes/No**
 7-4 Opportunity for voting? **Yes/No**
 7-5 Fill out a survey, poll or give opinion on issue(s)? **Yes/No**
 7-6 Send a postcard? **Yes/No**
 7-7 Quizzes, games? **Yes/No**
 7-8 Opportunity to log in to own e-mail/Web account? **Yes/No**

**8. Donor Publics – Usefulness of Information
(6 characteristics)**

8-1: Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**

If No, then move to question 8-2.

If Yes, skip to 8-3.

8-2: Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**

8-3 How to contribute money? **Yes/No**

8-4 Benefits/Incentives for giving? **Yes/No**

8-5 Information on how donations are used/spent? **Yes/No**

8-6 How to become affiliated/get involved? **Yes/No**

**9. Donor publics – Interactivity (Dialogic Loop)
(8 characteristics)**

9-1 Opportunity for user response (e-mail/bulletin/message/chat board)? **Yes/No**

9-2 Opportunity to sign up for regular information updates? **Yes/No**

9-3 Opportunity to update contact information? **Yes/No**

9-4 Opportunity for voting? **Yes/No**

9-5 Fill out a survey, poll or give opinion on issue(s)? **Yes/No**

9-6 Send a postcard? **Yes/No**

9-7 Quizzes, games? **Yes/No**

9-8 Opportunity to log in to own e-mail/Web account? **Yes/No**

**10. Onlive Giving Features
(14 characteristics)**

10-1 Online donation option? **Yes/No**

If yes, move to question 10-2.

If no, skip to question 10-9.

Type of online payment options:

10-2 Credit card? **Yes/No**

10-3 Electronic Check? **Yes/No**

10-4 Pay Pal? **Yes/No**

10-5 Mail-in form? **Yes/No**

10-6 Phone number to call in donation? **Yes/No**

10-7 Message about “Secure” Web site? **Yes/No**

10-8 Frequently Asked Questions? **Yes/No**

10-9 Clearly Identified Contact for Donations? **Yes/No**

10-10 Name? **Yes/No**

10-11 Title? **Yes/No**

10-12 Address? **Yes/No**

10-13 Phone? **Yes/No**

10-14 E-mail? **Yes/No**

APPENDIX C
CODING SHEET

Survey # _____

Name of Organization:

Web address (attach home page):

Date and time evaluated:

_____ MM/DD/YY 00:00 a.m. or p.m. _____

DIALOGIC FEATURES

**1. Ease of Interface
(6 characteristics)**

- 1-1 Site map or Web directory on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-2 Major links to rest of site on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-3 Search engine or search engine box on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-4 Logo of organization on Home page? **Yes/No**
- 1-5 Heavy graphic reliance? **Yes/No**
- 1-6 Information is accessible with images turned off? **Yes/No**

**2. Timeliness of Information (Conservation of Visitors)
(5 characteristics)**

Time Home page takes to load? (Try same time everyday for 5 days):

- 2-1 Day One Seconds: _____
- 2-2 Last updated time and date on Home page? **Yes/No** _____
- 2-2b: Month/Date/Yr MM/DD/YY
- 2-3 News stories or public information within last 30 days? **Yes/No**
- 2-4 Can a user subscribe for regular information via e-mail? **Yes/No**
- 2-5 Outside links (not belonging to the organization) on the Home page? **Yes/No**

1. Ease of Interface

- 1-1: 1=Yes/2=No
- 1-2: 1=Yes/2=No
- 1-3: 1=Yes/2=No
- 1-4: 1=Yes/2=No
- 1-5: 1=Yes/2=No
- 1-6: 1=Yes/2=No

2. Timeliness of Information

- 2-1: 0-120 Seconds
- 2-2: 1=Yes/2=No
- 2-2b: MM/DD/YY
- 2-3: 1=Yes/2=No
- 2-4: 1=Yes/2=No
- 2-5: 1=Yes/2=No

3. Generation of Return Visits (6 characteristics)

- 3-1 Explicit statement invites visitors to return? **Yes/No**
 3-2 "Bookmark Now" statement **Yes/No**
 3-3 Q & As/FAQs? **Yes/No**
 3-4 Calendar of events? **Yes/No**
 3-5 Downloadable information—PDF files etc? **Yes/No**
 3-6 Interactive opportunities (polls, quizzes, surveys, games, e-postcard)

4. Which publics are targeted by name on the Home page?

- 4-1 Alumni **Yes/No**
 4-2 Community **Yes/No**
 4-3 Companies/Organizations interested in Career Placement **Yes/No**
 4-4 Donors **Yes/No**
 4-5 Faculty/Staff **Yes/No**
 4-6 Friends **Yes/No**
 4-7 Job Seekers **Yes/No**
 4-8 Legislators **Yes/No**
 4-9 Media **Yes/No**
 4-10 Parents **Yes/No**
 4-11 Students **Yes/No**
 4-12 Trustees **Yes/No**
 4-13 Visitors **Yes/No**
 4-14 Patients **Yes/No**
 4-15 Other _____

5. Media publics – Usefulness of Information (19 characteristics)

- 5-1: Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**
 If No, then move to question 5-2.
 If Yes, skip to 5-3.
 5-2: Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**
 5-3: Press releases? **Yes/No**
 5-4 Archive? **Yes/No**
 If Yes, move to question 5-5.
 If No, then move to question 5-7.
 5-5 Time-length of archive? _____ **Months**
 5-6 Organized by? **Chronological/Topical**
 5-7 Speeches? **Yes/No**
 5-8 Biographical Information? **Yes/No**
 5-9 Philosophy/Mission statement? **Yes/No**
 5-10 Downloadable graphics? **Yes/No**

3. Generation of Return Visits

- 3-1: 1=Yes/2=No
 3-2: 1=Yes/2=No
 3-3: 1=Yes/2=No
 3-4: 1=Yes/2=No
 3-5: 1=Yes/2=No
 3-6: 1=Yes/2=No

4. Targeted Publics

- 4-1: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-2: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-3: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-4: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-5: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-6: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-7: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-8: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-9: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-10: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-11: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-12: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-13: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-14: 1=Yes/2=No
 4-15: _____

5. Media/Usefulness

- 5-1: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-2: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-3: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-4: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-5: _____ Months
 5-6: 1=Chron/2=Topic
 5-7: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-8: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-9: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-10: 1=Yes/2=No

- 5-11 Audio or video clips? **Yes/No**
 5-12 Clearly Identified Media Contact? **Yes/No**
 5-13 Name? **Yes/No**
 5-14 Title? **Yes/No**
 5-15 Address? **Yes/No**
 5-16 Phone? **Yes/No**
 5-17 E-mail? **Yes/No**
 5-18 News Forums? **Yes/No**
 5-19 Listing of experts/sources for the media to search/
 identify potential sources? **Yes/No**

**6. Alumni Publics – Usefulness of Information
 (13 characteristics)**

- 6-1 Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**
 If Yes, move to question 6-3.
 If No, then move to question 6-2.
 6-2 Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**
 6-3 How to become affiliated/get involved? **Yes/No**
 6-4 How to contribute money? **Yes/No**
 6-5 Alumni magazine/publication? **Yes/No**
 6-6 Notes about each class (Class Notes)? **Yes/No**
 6-7 Alumni/Membership Group? **Yes/No**
 If Yes, then move to question 6-8.
 If No, then move to 6-10.
 6-8 Benefits? **Yes/No**
 6-9 Online signup? **Yes/No**
 6-10 Calendar of alumni events? **Yes/No**
 6-11 Job opportunities? **Yes/No**
 6-12 Alumni travel opportunities? **Yes/No**
 6-13 Online merchandise/shopping? **Yes/No**

**7. Alumni Publics –Interactivity (Dialogic Loop)
 (8 characteristics)**

- 7-1 Opportunity for user response (e-mail/bulletin/message/
 chat board)? **Yes/No**
 7-2 Opportunity to sign up for regular information updates? **Yes/No**
 7-3 Opportunity to update contact information? **Yes/No**
 7-4 Opportunity for voting? **Yes/No**
 7-5 Fill out a survey, poll or give opinion on issue(s)? **Yes/No**
 7-6 Send a postcard? **Yes/No**
 7-7 Quizzes, games? **Yes/No**
 7-8 Opportunity to log in to own e-mail/Web account? **Yes/No**

- 5-11: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-12: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-13: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-14: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-15: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-16: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-17: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-18: 1=Yes/2=No
 5-19: 1=Yes/2=No

6. Alumni/Usefulness

- 6-1: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-2: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-3: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-4: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-5: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-6: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-7: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-8: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-9: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-10: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-11: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-12: 1=Yes/2=No

- 6-13: 1=Yes/2=No

7. Alumni/Interactiv

- 7-1: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-2: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-3: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-4: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-5: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-6: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-7: 1=Yes/2=No

- 7-8: 1=Yes/2=No

8. Donor Publics – Usefulness of Information (6 characteristics)

8-1: Targeted on home page? **Yes/No**

If No, then move to question 8-2.

If Yes, skip to 8-3.

8-2: Targeted on subsequent page? **Yes/No**

8-3 How to contribute money? **Yes/No**

8-4 Benefits/Incentives for giving? **Yes/No**

8-5 Information on how donations are used/spent? **Yes/No**

8-6 How to become affiliated/get involved? **Yes/No**

9. Donor publics – Interactivity (Dialogic Loop) (8 characteristics)

9-1 Opportunity for user response (e-mail/bulletin/message/
chat board)? **Yes/No**

9-2 Opportunity to sign up for regular information updates? **Yes/No**

9-3 Opportunity to update contact information? **Yes/No**

9-4 Opportunity for voting? **Yes/No**

9-5 Fill out a survey, poll or give opinion on issue(s)? **Yes/No**

9-6 Send a postcard? **Yes/No**

9-7 Quizzes, games? **Yes/No**

9-8 Opportunity to log in to own e-mail/Web account? **Yes/No**

10. Online Giving Features (14 characteristics)

10-1 Online donation option? **Yes/No**

If yes, move to question 10-2.

If no, skip to question 10-9.

Type of online payment options:

10-2 Credit card? **Yes/No**

10-3 Electronic Check? **Yes/No**

10-4 Pay Pal? **Yes/No**

10-5 Mail-in form? **Yes/No**

10-6 Phone number to call in donation? **Yes/No**

10-7 Message about “Secure” Web site? **Yes/No**

10-8 Frequently Asked Questions? **Yes/No**

10-9 Clearly Identified Contact for Donations? **Yes/No**

10-10 Name? **Yes/No**

10-11 Title? **Yes/No**

10-12 Address? **Yes/No**

10-13 Phone? **Yes/No**

10-14 E-mail? **Yes/No**

8. Donor/Usefulness

8-1: 1=Yes/2=No

8-2: 1=Yes/2=No

8-3: 1=Yes/2=No

8-4: 1=Yes/2=No

8-5: 1=Yes/2=No

8-6: 1=Yes/2=No

9. Donor/Interactiv

9-1: 1=Yes/2=No

9-2: 1=Yes/2=No

9-3: 1=Yes/2=No

9-4: 1=Yes/2=No

9-5: 1=Yes/2=No

9-6: 1=Yes/2=No

9-7: 1=Yes/2=No

9-8: 1=Yes/2=No

10. Online Giving

10-1: 1=Yes/2=No

10-2: 1=Yes/2=No

10-3: 1=Yes/2=No

10-4: 1=Yes/2=No

10-5: 1=Yes/2=No

10-6: 1=Yes/2=No

10-7: 1=Yes/2=No

10-8: 1=Yes/2=No

10-9: 1=Yes/2=No

10-10: 1=Yes/2=No

10-11: 1=Yes/2=No

10-12: 1=Yes/2=No

10-13: 1=Yes/2=No

10-14: 1=Yes/2=No

APPENDIX D
TOP 25 COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY WEB SITES

This table presents the top 25 college and university Web sites that scored the highest on the incorporation of the characteristics of dialogic communication.

[Object D-1. Excel Spreadsheet of Top 25 College and University Websites
\(objectd1.xls, 30 KB\)](#)

[Object D-2. Comma separated variable file of Top 25 College and University Websites
\(objectd2.csv, 5 KB\)](#)

[Object D-3. Tab delimited text file Top 25 College and University Websites
\(objectd3.txt, 5 KB\)](#)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mandelyn C. Hutcherson was born in Amarillo, Texas, and raised in Littlefield, Texas. She graduated as valedictorian from Littlefield High School in 1996 and summa cum laude from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, with a bachelor's degree in public relations and a minor in Spanish in 2001. She was awarded as an Outstanding Student in the College of Arts and Sciences at Texas Tech University at the time of her graduation. In July 2002, Mandelyn married Justin Hutcherson, and they relocated to Gainesville, Florida.

Mandelyn has approximately five years of management experience with Bath and Body Works, American Eagle Outfitters and the University of Florida. For the last three years, she has worked for the University of Florida. She is currently employed with the College of Veterinary Medicine as a coordinator of administrative services. Mandelyn completes her Master of Arts in Mass Communication, specializing in public relations, during the summer of 2005.

Mandelyn plans to continue working for the University of Florida after graduation and aspires to become a public relations leader in higher education or the nonprofit sector.