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University Public Relations: A Survey of University Communicators' Efforts to Influence U.S. News & World Report Peer Survey Respondents

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UNIVERSITY PUBLIC RELATIONS: A SURVEY OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATORS'
EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE *U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT*
PEER SURVEY RESPONDENTS

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EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE *U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT*
PEER SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism

By

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Abstract

This study examined what differences exist between the work of public relations professionals (also called communicators) who are members of CASE, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* and CASE-member communicators at colleges and universities that are ranked between 21 and 200 in their behavior in four areas: (1) communication goals they consider top priorities, (2) types of communication tasks they perform, (3) types of media in which they purchase advertising, and (4) their rating of audience importance. A survey completed by CASE-member communicators at colleges and universities found very little difference between the two groups in these four areas. These findings support the premise of institutional theory that organizations adopt similar behaviors because they face similar pressures, both formal and informal, that influence them. This study also finds that possible pressures influencing these communicators include the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of colleges and universities and CASE ethical and operational principles.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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Introduction: Promoting Colleges and Universities Through Public Relations

Professionals who work in public relations, or communications, at colleges and universities perform several varied and important functions for their institutions (Kummerfeldt, 1975; Moore, 2004). American colleges and universities are more involved in marketing their products and services than at any time in the history of higher education (Klassen, 2000). According to Klassen (2000), three factors may explain the increase in marketing by American colleges and universities: (1) a decreasing population of potential students, (2) political and economic pressure to be more responsive to the challenges today's students face in the work force, and (3) market dynamics led by sophisticated student-consumers who see a college degree more as a necessity than a privilege. These potential students often approach the purchase of a college education no differently than other expensive products (Klassen, 2000). Klassen (2000) contributed to the small body of literature about what communication pieces colleges and universities produce with his study of the college viewbook, which is designed to reach prospective students. The responsibilities of public relations professionals at colleges and universities include creating publications and disseminating news and information in other manners such as news releases and media pitches and providing content for social media sites. These duties promote the goals of college and university offices of communication to attract students, faculty, and staff; demonstrate to policymakers and funders that the goals of the institution are being met; show private donors their money at work and potential donors what can be done with their money; help keep alumni engaged with the institution; and help to build and maintain a high-quality reputation (Moore, 2004).

To help communicators accomplish these goals, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) provides guidance through conferences, publications, networking,

and ethical and operational principles. CASE is a professional association serving educational institutions and their advancement professionals in alumni relations, communications, development, marketing, and allied areas (About CASE, n.d.). CASE was founded in 1974 with the merger of the American Alumni Council and the American College Public Relations Association. An international association, CASE has headquarters in Washington, D.C., with offices in London, Singapore, and Mexico City. It includes 3,600 colleges and universities, primary and secondary independent and international schools, and nonprofit organizations in 76 countries, and it serves nearly 70,000 advancement professionals (About CASE, n.d.). CASE has developed or endorsed ethical standards and principles of practice to guide and reinforce professional conduct among its members (see Appendix A) (About CASE, n.d.).

The purpose of the research described in this paper was to examine whether differences exist between college and university public relations professionals at higher-education institutions ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* and communicators at institutions ranked between 21 and 200 in regard to (1) the communication goals they consider to be top priorities, (2) the types of communication tasks they perform, (3) the types of media in which they purchase advertising, and (4) the audiences they rate most important. Institutional theory says that various forms of pressure, both formal and informal, lead organizations to act in similar ways. Forms of pressure that could influence communicators include the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings because institutions ranked in the top 20 feel pressure to stay there and institutions ranked between 21 and 200 feel pressure to move up (Standifird, 2005). The *U.S. News & World Report* has become one of the premier benchmarks for ranking among institutions of higher education in the United States (Standifird, 2005). The rankings are based on scores compiled from the categories shown in Table 1 (*U.S. News & World Report Methodology*, n.d.):

Table 1

Breakdown of scores for U.S. News rankings

Category	Percentage of total
Undergraduate academic reputation	22.5
Student selectivity for current fall class	15
Faculty resources	20
Graduation and retention rates	20
Financial resources per student	10
Alumni giving rate	5
Graduation rate performance	7.5

Some universities have attempted to influence their reputation among peers, a category that counts for 22.5% of their score, by sending promotional material to peer academic institutions (Argetsinger, 2002). In the *Washington Post*, Argetsinger (2002) described some of the promotional material that college and university presidents, deans, and admissions officers receive from their peers including glossy brochures, letters, annual reports, alumni magazines, and novelty items such as a box of golf balls, a five-pound Hershey chocolate bar, a jar of chili peppers, and a miniature magnetic chessboard.

The principles of public relations work as outlined by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) may be another form of pressure. Members are expected to adhere to these principles because they will be most successful when (1) they are present in the

inner management circle of their institution in order to provide strategic and crisis counsel, convey the viewpoints of primary publics, and help to formulate policies; (2) they undertake ongoing, targeted communication programs that use multiple channels appropriate to the audience and the message; and (3) their efforts support the institution's strategic communication plan (Principles of Practice, n.d.).

According to institutional theory, organizations in a particular field become more similar to each other as they mature through the process of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Isomorphism creates similarity in form. It is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968).

This paper will discuss how institutional theory applies to the field of communication, how offices of communication at colleges and universities gain legitimacy, and why communication professionals may be influenced by the process of isomorphism. Isomorphism is measured by determining similarities of strategy and behavior by organizations and exploring the reasons those similarities developed; in the case of this paper, the strategies and behavior examined include the communication goals that communicators consider to be top priorities, the types of communication tasks they perform, the types of media in which they purchase advertising, and the audiences they rate to be most important.

The information presented in this paper will help public relations professionals at colleges and universities improve their communication efforts with their various audiences by giving benchmarks by which their peers operate. It also gives insight into how communicators approach the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings and, in some cases, try to influence them.

Literature Review

A review of the literature about institutional theory shows the history of its development and application in various fields such as government, auto manufacturing, education, and newspaper publishing. This review defines and gives context for terms such as isomorphism and legitimacy. This section also reviews research conducted into the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings and their influence on colleges and universities. It goes on to describe what previous research has been done on the communication activities of public relations professionals at colleges and universities, on professional associations, and on differences among types of higher-education institutions.

Modern institutional theory may be traced back to the work of Max Weber, a German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist, who wrote that bureaucracy was so efficient and powerful a means of controlling people that, once established, the momentum of bureaucracy was irreversible (Weber, 1922). Weber used the term “an iron cage” to describe the efficiency of the bureaucratic form of institution that made its adoption inevitable. He attributed this bureaucracy to three related causes: (1) competition among capitalist firms in the marketplace; (2) competition among states, increasing rulers’ need to control their staff and citizenry; and (3) bourgeois demands for equal protection under the law (Weber, 1922).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) argued that the causes of bureaucratization have changed since Weber wrote about organizations. They sought to explain what they called the startling homogeneity of organizational forms and practices and said institutional pressures to conform affect organizations, making them more homogeneous (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Legitimacy is an “organizational imperative that is both a source of inertia and a summons to justify particular forms and practices” (Selznick, 1996, p.273). Scott (1995)

introduced three bases of legitimacy for organizations: regulative, normative, and cognitive. He (1995) explained that the regulative pillar involves rules, laws, and sanctions; the normative pillar involves social obligation, norms, and values; and the cognitive pillar involves symbols, beliefs, and social identities (1995). Institutions gain legitimacy through the regulative pillar by following the rules, through the normative pillar by complying with internalized morals, and through the cognitive pillar by doing things the way they have been done in the past (Scott, 1995).

Although newly established organizational fields show considerable diversity in approach and form, as organizations mature there is an unmistakable push toward homogenization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) said the concept that best captured the process of homogenization is isomorphism. They cited Hawley's description (1968) that isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. Hawley (1968) called isomorphism an expression of standardization and wrote that it results from the necessity that all parts of an ecosystem maximize their intelligibility to one another. Otherwise, exchanges and communication would be severely handicapped (Hawley, 1968.) Hannan and Freeman (1977), who studied competition as a mechanism that produces isomorphism, explained that isomorphism can result either because nonoptimal forms are selected out of a community of organizations or because organizational decision-makers learn optimal responses and adjust organizational behavior accordingly. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) identified three types of isomorphism: (1) coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; (2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and (3) normative isomorphism, which is associated with professionalism. Coercive isomorphism results

from both formal and informal pressures that are exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent, pressures such as government-mandated pollution controls required of manufacturers and financial reporting requirements that ensure eligibility for government contracts (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991). Mimetic isomorphism occurs when organizations model themselves after other organizations as a response to situations in which goals are ambiguous or when the environment creates uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). They choose to model themselves after organizations that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). An example cited by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) was the Japanese government's decision in the late 19th century to model new governmental initiatives on western prototypes. Japan sent its government officials to study the courts, Army, and police in France; the Navy and postal system in Great Britain; and banking and art education in the United States. Organizations behave like other organizations they perceive as successful, especially when it's difficult to determine exactly what they need to do to be successful themselves. They may take the attitude of "it worked for them, so it might work for us" (Powers, 2000, p. 2). Normative isomorphism occurs because members of an occupation struggle to define the conditions and methods of their work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Formal education and professional networks are two aspects of professionalism that are important sources of normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Institutional theory also addresses the question of whether organizations become more efficient as they mature. Adoption of innovation or other changes in an organizational field provides legitimacy rather than necessarily improving performance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meyer and Rowan (1977) wrote that organizational success depends on more than efficient coordination and control of productive activities. Merely existing in a highly elaborated

institutional environment and succeeding in becoming isomorphic with that environment allows an organization to gain legitimacy and resources needed to survive (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Singh, Tucker, and House (1986) found that organizations acquiring a charitable registration number from Revenue Canada, which signified that they met state standards and were eligible for tax-deductible contributions, were more likely to survive during the first years of their existence than those that did not acquire the registration number. Their research supports the sustaining effects of regulative and normative processes on organizations (Singh et al., 1986). None of the descriptions given by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) of isomorphic pressures relies on efficiency, and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) say each can be expected to proceed in the absence of evidence that they increase organizational efficiency.

Rao (1994) addressed the effect of certification processes such as accreditation, ratings, rankings, and contests on helping an organization gain legitimacy. He studied contests on hill climbing, fuel economy, endurance, and speed that pitted automobile manufacturers against each other between 1895 and 1912 and compared the data to the number of auto manufacturers that exited the industry during the same period through bankruptcy, cessation of operations, or withdrawal by an organization. His results suggested that certification contests legitimize organizations and enable them to create favorable reputations (Rao, 1994). The act of endorsement by third parties such as professional societies, ratings agencies, auditors, and government regulators embeds an organization in a status hierarchy and thereby builds the reputation of an organization (Scott, 1994).

Rankings such as those published annually by *U.S. News & World Report* are important to colleges and universities because of their effect on such vital aspects of an institution's success as student enrollment, fund-raising, and building reputation in order to attract the most

high-quality students, faculty, and staff. Bastedo and Bowman (2009) wrote that higher education administrators believe revenues are linked to college rankings. They reviewed data taken from print editions of the college rankings, peer assessments, changes in institutional quality, and the proportion of alumni donating to institutions with a total sample of 225 universities (Bastedo & Bowman, 2009). They also used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Set on in-state and out-of-state tuition and fees and on institutional control (public vs. private ownership), and data from a survey of funding from foundations and total donations from alumni done by the Council for Aid to Education's Voluntary Support of Education (Bastedo & Bowman, 2009). College rankings in 1998 significantly predicted financial indicators in 2006 (Bastedo & Bowman, 2009) with the study finding that being ranked below Tier 1 (Tier 1 being institutions ranked in the top 50 for purposes of the Bastedo and Bowman study) adversely affects research and development funding, the proportion of alumni donating, and out-of-state tuition and fees. Bastedo and Bowman also suggest from their research (2009 and 2010) that, while rankings may be designed to affect students, parents, and policymakers, their impact is far more demonstrable on universities themselves. Other research (Sauder & Fine, 2008; Stevens, 2007) suggests universities have sought to reduce the influence of the *U.S. News* survey by manipulating the data provided to it. Stevens (2007) reported that a national liberal arts college in New York manipulated the data in its survey report to stay within self-defined ethical bounds but also to ensure that the college was portrayed in the most flattering light. Sauder and Fine (2008) described how, in order to influence national surveys, business school administrators used the tactics of selecting certain pieces of information most relevant to their audiences, synthesizing vast amounts of information, and simplifying information so that it can be communicated easily and widely. This allowed the schools to decide which information to

present to the rankers and how to present it (Sauder & Fine, 2008). Sauder and Fine (2008) interviewed 25 business school deans, three marketing directors, and two associate deans of admissions. In their interviews, business school deans emphasized the growth of the public relations function since the establishment of the rankings. Deans work with public relations professionals to decide the school's marketing strategy and the budget allocated to such efforts, as well as developing branding strategies and other identity-construction measures (Sauder & Fine, 2008). In 2009, the former director of institutional research at Clemson University revealed at a professional conference that senior officials at Clemson sought to engineer each statistic *U.S. News* uses in rating colleges to propel the school into the top 20 public research universities (Lederman, 2009).

Research has shown that some colleges and universities adopt changes in policy or programs to affect their standing in the categories used to determine the rankings, such as adopting early-decision admission policies that allow an institution to improve its yield, which is the ratio of the number of students who matriculate to the number admitted (Machung, 1998). Yield is one of the categories that make up a school's final score in the *U.S. News* rankings. However, little research has been done to study what communication practices, including types of publications created, that offices of communication at colleges and universities employ to try to influence the peer reputational survey portion of the score. Gaining a clear picture of what these communicators produce – including print and online magazines, brochures, fliers, posters, postcards, websites, email newsletters, and social media content – is necessary before further research can be done to study the value of these pieces in raising the reputational score derived from the *U.S. News* peer survey. In their development of a model that predicted the *U.S. News* peer assessment score and their analysis of five years of data from 247 universities, Brennan,

Brodnick, and Pinckley (2007) found that the magazine's chosen variables all measured the same small number of underlying factors, making it unclear how the magazine's rankings adequately differentiate between institutions. The magazine rankings' effect on higher education is to reinforce a system that is already in place (Brennan et al., 2007), and the authors suggest that marketers should face the fact that rankings aren't going away any time soon but they must not be overvalued. The researchers (2007) recommend focusing on competitive advantages that distinguish an institution from its peer group in seven dimensions: inputs and outputs, control (public or private), research, diversity, institutional affluence, student aid, and size, and gathering additional data on what matters to stakeholders, resulting in strong, differentiating messages that communicate the institution's real benefits to key constituencies (Brennan et al., 2007).

Gioia and Corley (2002) found that business school rankings act as a source of institutional isomorphic pressure on business schools to place greater emphasis on image than substance. Gioia and Corley (2002) conducted 42 interviews with business school deans, Master of Business Administration program directors, and communication directors or public information officers at 16 universities. They reported that business schools, in order to improve their rankings, shift resources away from substantive teaching improvements such as course development, classroom facilities, and educational infrastructure, to image-management enterprises such as public relations departments, image consultants, and responding to media. Gioia and Corley (2002) found that the business schools began to tout "image-related features over bona fide quality features" at their schools. Promoting image enhancement contributed to the schools' legitimacy as described in coercive isomorphism and served as a response to uncertainty as described in mimetic isomorphism (Gioia & Corley, 2002).

In another example, Atkinson (2008) studied how 28 randomly sampled, research-intensive universities represent themselves to the public and found that all three types of isomorphism affected their use of media, image, and metaphor in both their mission statements and university websites. By examining the websites of these universities, Atkinson (2008) measured the use of photographs of students, photographs of buildings, seals and logos, and slogans on the websites. The result was that many of the institutions copied each other in the choice of symbols to represent their institutions. Although it is reasonable to expect each institution to have its own character, culture, institutionalized behaviors, and reputations that are vastly different from each other, according to Atkinson (2008), their mission statements and websites did not illustrate these differences, suggesting the effect of isomorphism.

Pitts, Hicklin, Hawes, & Melton (2010) measure two dependent variables, that of socialization by education and socialization by networking, in a study on whether isomorphic pressure is a factor in public school systems' decisions to implement diversity management programs. The data came from a 2007 survey of public school district superintendents in Texas. Socialization by education was measured by whether the superintendent held a doctorate and the number of years since completion of highest degree. Socialization by networking was measured by how frequently the superintendents interacted with others such as school board members, teachers' associations, parent groups, local business leaders, other superintendents, and government officials (Pitts et al., 2010). On the education variable, the researchers expected that the likelihood to implement diversity management programs would depend on the norms to which the superintendent is exposed. They expected superintendents with doctorates and superintendents who have completed graduate work more recently would be more likely to hold those norms that would lead them to pursue diversity initiatives (Pitts et al., 2010). On the

networking variable, the researchers hypothesized that, as superintendents become more engaged in their environment and interact more with other districts and local organizations, they will be more likely to engage in diversity management. They hypothesized that superintendents who interact with others in the external environment are more likely to learn about new ideas and innovations, as well as feel social pressure to implement programs that are being developed in other districts (Pitts et al., 2010). Analysis of the data showed that superintendents who were well educated or educated more recently were not more likely to be exposed to diversity management. However, the results suggested that interaction with others in an external environment may lead organizations to engage in diversity management (Pitts et al., 2010). Pitts et al. (2010) concluded that organizations in the same field gradually adapt to the same norms and implement programs because peer organizations seem to think they are socially necessary.

Ashworth, Boyne, & Delbridge (2007) used data from an email survey of local government officials in 2001 and 2004 to explore isomorphic change in public sector organizations. The researchers examined the impact of the United Kingdom central government's introduction of a statutory framework for the organization and management of local government services. The survey was divided into four sections with a Likert scale response asking officials questions about structure, culture, strategy process, and strategy content of their organizations. The researchers examined whether local authorities responded to isomorphic pressures by adopting the organizational characteristics associated with the framework that was introduced by the central government (Ashworth et al., 2007). The extent of voluntary copying of other local authorities regarded as high performing is indicative of the presence of mimetic isomorphic pressures (Ashworth et al. 2007), and they cite the formation of benchmarking clubs by local governing councils and the creation of a Beacon Council to

recognize the best performing councils and to spread best practices. The researchers decided that the extent to which their findings support institutional theory depended on how they interpreted the concept of conformity when analyzing their results (Ashworth et al., 2007). When the researchers viewed conformity as compliance with organizational characteristics, most of their evidence was consistent with isomorphic pressures. When the researchers viewed conformity as the organizations converged to resemble each other, they did so on only 15 of the 33 characteristics studied. The Ashworth et al. (2007) study sought to distinguish between core and peripheral attributes of organizations and test whether peripheral attributes are more likely to conform to forces in the institutional environment. They found more similarities among organizations in the core attributes of culture and strategy than on the peripheral attributes of structures and processes.

Dacin (1997) used data on the language of publication of Finnish newspapers in the 19th century to study the power of institutional norms on isomorphism. She found (1997) that institutional pressures were more important in determining isomorphism than market forces during a period of nationalism affecting the Finnish newspapers. Institutional pressures cause organizations to incorporate institutionally favored characteristics and become isomorphic with the goal of being judged as appropriate or legitimate (Dacin, 1997). According to Palea (2012), professional associations play a key role in developing, promoting, and strengthening a profession by establishing and implementing codes of ethics and professional standards, creating conditions for the development of professionals, and defining, regulating, and establishing the status of the profession.

Valentine and Barnett (2003) found that people who were aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organizations perceived their organizations as having more ethical values

than those not aware of an ethics code in their organization, and, secondly, that people exhibited higher levels of organizational commitment when they were aware of an ethics code in their companies. They collected data as part of a larger study of ethical decision-making in business. Respondents indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with nine positively worded items on an organizational commitment questionnaire (Valentine & Barnett, 2003).

To help university administrators and communicators understand academic communication current and best practices in terms of effectiveness and best use of resources, the University of Florida conducted a communications benchmarking survey of CASE members (Brounley, 2010.) The Florida study used an online survey to ask respondents about their institution's use of strategic messaging, identity standards, perceived effectiveness of campus communications, barriers to communication, communication structures, communication channels and frequency by targeted audience, perceived effectiveness of communication channels, and monitoring effectiveness of communication activities (Brounley, 2010). Several themes emerged from the findings: (1) a clear disconnect exists between institutional- and unit-level communicators apparently because of ineffective two-way, internal communication regarding goals of the two groups; both groups recognize the disconnect and attribute it to a lack of leadership in establishing and effectively disseminating strategic communications; (2) the more decentralized an institution is, the more likely internal communication is perceived to be ineffective; and (3) significant gaps exist in establishing strategic communication plans with defined themes, messages, and goals for each targeted audience and implementing formal measurement programs to quantify effectiveness of communication activities (Brounley, 2010). According to the CASE principles, strategic planning affects the quality of publications.

Research has shown that differences exist among types of institutions in several areas. After comparing differences in faculty salaries and benefits between public and private research and doctoral universities (n = 139 public institutions and 75 private institutions) at each academic rank, Alexander (2001) reported that the relative fiscal compensation of private university faculty has increased much faster than the benefits of public university faculty since 1980. Market incentives and government restrictions have collaborated to put public universities at a disadvantage in the academic labor market (Alexander, 2001). Alexander (2001) attributes the disparity in part to the internationalization of the academic labor market in which faculty are semi-autonomous professionals, some of whom have only a minimal attachment to their employer. Another contributing factor is that a central government authority in several countries establishes faculty salaries for many public universities (Alexander, 2001). In more market-driven systems like the United States, universities have greater autonomy in determining salaries and benefits of new faculty; however, they lack the institutional autonomy to maintain competitive faculty salaries because of fiscal constraints imposed by state governments that have a direct impact on ability to give salary increases (Alexander, 2001).

Morphew and Hartley (2006) studied mission statements, asking how college and university mission statements differ in content and whether any of the differences reflected recognized differences between institutional types. They identified 118 distinct elements, such as being teaching-centered and serving the local area, across the mission statements they studied and found that (1) institutional control – whether a college or university was public or private – was more important in predicting mission statement elements than the Carnegie classification; (2) a few elements, such as the notion that the institution is committed to diversity or to providing a liberal arts education, appear frequently across institutional types; and (3) that there

is a prevalence of elements related specifically to service either by the institution or through the inculcation of civic values in students, although the definition of service differs somewhat between public and private institutions (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). They described their research as a first step in attempting to answer the question of whether mission statements are primarily normative documents designed to provide internal and external audiences with evidence of legitimacy (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Institutional theory suggests that creating a mission statement can be one way for an organization to move toward legitimization.

Warner and Koepfel (2009) studied whether general education requirements varied in relation to the *U.S. News & World Report* tier in which a school is ranked. They also examined whether differences in general education requirements exist in relation to the type of school (Warner & Koepfel, 2009). They randomly selected 72 schools from the 2007 *U.S. News* ranking in three categories within each tier: national research universities, master's comprehensive schools, and liberal arts schools. By reviewing each schools' online catalogs, Warner and Koepfel (2009) suggested that students in schools that are ranked higher in the *U.S. News* evaluations have more choices within the general education program than do students from lower-ranked schools; for example, students at Tier 1¹ schools had an average of 49.8 literature courses to choose from to meet the general education requirement in literature while students at Tier 4 schools had an average of 5.8 literature courses from which to choose. Institutional theory suggests that institutions in the lower-tier schools will strive to imitate the schools in the higher tier by offering more course selections, although other factors such as cost may hamper their efforts.

¹ The Warner and Koepfel (2009) paper did not define how the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings were divided among four tiers.

Edmiston-Strasser (2009) conducted one of the first studies on the impact of integrated marketing communication on public institutions of higher education by analyzing 42 leading U.S. public colleges and universities as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* (she was not more specific about these institutions' ranking). She found that integrated marketing communication – which she defined as a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences – is practiced across a diverse range of colleges and universities, as well as being taught in their classrooms, and that support by an institution's leaders was the single most powerful determinant of whether an integrated marketing communication strategy was successful (Edmiston-Strasser, 2009). She asked broad questions such as whether all marketing material that was produced featured consistent visual elements and whether control and approval of all communication efforts were centralized within an institution-wide office but did not include in her survey questions about what specific pieces the offices of communication produced. Adding knowledge to the topic of what communication pieces are produced could assist public relations professionals at colleges and universities when they are developing strategic plans of operation and planning the best use of their communication budgets.

A survey conducted in 2010 by Lipman Hearne, a marketing and communications firm serving nonprofit organizations, and CASE found that annual spending on marketing by a mid-sized college or university (2,000-5,999 students) grew more than 100% over a decade's time, from \$259,400 in 2001 to \$800,000 in 2009 (Lipman Hearne, 2010). The moderate-to-heavy investors in research and planning, defined as those who spent at least 6% of their marketing budgets on those activities, were also more likely to use social media, produce admissions

viewbooks, and convene institution-wide marketing committees (Lipman Hearne, 2010). The Lipman Hearne report (2010) included information on communication activities, with the top five being planning and hosting student recruitment events, purchasing print/magazine/newspaper advertising, producing admissions print pieces, producing an alumni or institution magazine, and maintaining e-communications with alumni (Lipman Hearne, 2010).

Hypotheses and Research Question

The purpose of the research described in this paper was to examine whether differences exist between college and university public relations professionals at higher-education institutions ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* and communicators at institutions ranked between 21 and 200 in regard to (1) the communication goals they consider to be top priorities, (2) the types of communication tasks they perform, (3) the types of media in which they purchase advertising, and (4) their rating of audience importance. Based on this purpose, my study used responses to a survey of communication practices to explore several hypotheses and research questions:

H1: Communication offices of colleges and universities that are ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* use similar communication methods – such as distributing news releases and media pitches, producing print and online magazines, posting content on social media platforms, and sending email messages – that communication offices of colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 also use.

H2: Communication offices of colleges and universities that are ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* follow similar operational principles outlined by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for communications and marketing professionals at educational institutions – such as maintaining a presence in the inner management circle, supporting the institution's strategic plan, and using multiple communication channels to reach multiple audiences – that colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 also follow.

RQ1: Were any important (although not statistically significant) differences found between colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* and colleges and universities that are ranked between 21 and 200?

Methods

To test the two hypotheses and answer the research question, an online survey was conducted about the communication practices of communicators at college and universities, all of whom are members of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). The survey of 21 questions² (see Appendix B for complete questionnaire) was created using Qualtrix software available at the University of Arkansas and emailed from a CASE email account to the 1,625 CASE members at U.S. colleges and universities identified by their job titles as working in communications and marketing at higher-education institutions. CASE is a professional organization that colleges and universities can choose whether to join, which means the entire population of communicators in the United States would be larger than the population that are members of CASE. Within the CASE membership, the survey was sent to the entire population of CASE members identified as working in communications and marketing. Not all CASE-member institutions employ people whose job titles reflect responsibilities in communications and marketing. At some institutions, these responsibilities are folded into positions such as associate or assistant deans, recruiters and admissions officers. The total number of higher-education institutions that belong to CASE is about 3,600, but that includes institutions in 76 countries and the survey was limited to communicators in the United States. The survey was first emailed on Tuesday, July 10, a reminder was sent on Tuesday, July 24, and the survey was closed on Tuesday, July 31. The survey was distributed during the middle of summer, a time period considered by the author, who works as a communicator for a university, as the most likely time that a university communicator would take time to respond to it. Communicators work on a 12-month schedule but may be a little less busy after the spring

² The 21st question asked respondents whether they wanted to receive a copy of a summary report of the survey results by email and was not included in the data analysis.

semester has wrapped up and before the fall semester has started. Two reminders were sent at two-week intervals at the recommendation of the CASE official who arranged for the emails to be sent, with the thought that any communicators who had not responded during that time period did not plan to respond at all.

The following variables were measured in the following ways (see Appendix B for complete questionnaire):

- The importance of various communication goals as priorities of the respondents' communication office (see Appendix B, Question 1). Respondents rated a list of seven communication goals such as supporting enrollment growth and raising public awareness of the institution on a five-point Likert scale from "not at all a priority" to "the top priority" (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- The frequency with which 11 communication tasks or functions were performed (see Appendix B, Question 2). Respondents answered for each communication task such as writing news releases, producing magazines, and posting social media content on a seven-point Likert scale from "never" to "daily" (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- The media in which advertising is purchased (see Appendix B, Question 3). Respondents indicated whether their communication offices purchased advertising in media in eight categories including newspapers, magazines and journals, television and radio, websites, and social media (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- The importance of 14 audiences to communication efforts (see Appendix B, Question 4). Respondents rated the choices such as alumni, legislators, and faculty at peer

- institutions on a seven-point Likert scale from “not important at all” to “very important” (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- Whether the respondent’s communication office has a strategic communication plan (see Appendix B, Question 5). Respondents answered yes and they use it regularly, yes but they only use it sometimes, yes but they rarely use it, and they are in the process of creating a plan (Brounley, 2010).
 - The number of full-time professional communications staff in the respondent’s communications office (see Appendix B, Question 6). Respondents filled in the blank to indicate the number of employees (Arpan et al., 2003).
 - The annual budget of the respondent’s communications office (see Appendix B, Question 7). The respondents selected one of five choices within a range of spending from under \$50,000 to more than \$1 million (Lipman Hearne, 2010).
 - Whether the respondent works in a centralized communications office serving the entire campus or a decentralized office serving a single unit (see Appendix B, Question 8). Respondents selected one or the other choices (Brounley, 2010).
 - The current ranking of the respondent’s institution in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of all national institutions (see Appendix B, Question 9). Respondents selected one of six choices within a range from the top 20 to between 151 and 200 (Arpan, 2003; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
 - Whether the institution’s leaders inform the respondent of the importance they place on *U.S. News & World Report* rankings (see Appendix B, Question 10). Respondents selected yes or no (Brounley, 2010).

- How the institution's leaders inform the respondent of the importance they place on *U.S. News & World Report* rankings (see Appendix B, Question 11). Respondents were given an open-ended option for the question (Brounley, 2010).
- What pieces the respondent's communications office distributed to try to improve the institution's ranking (see Appendix B, Question 12). Respondents were given a list of 25 types of communication pieces and could choose as many as applied (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- Whether the respondent believed the pieces were effective (see Appendix B, Question 13). Respondents selected yes or no (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- If the answer to the previous question was yes, why the respondent believed the pieces were effective (see Appendix B, Question 14). Respondents were given an open-ended option for the question (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- What else the respondent's communications office did to try to improve the ranking (see Appendix B, Question 15). Respondents were given an open-ended option for the question (Brounley, 2010; Lipman Hearne, 2010).
- Respondent's job title (see Appendix B, Question 16). Respondents were given an open-ended option for the question (Brounley, 2010).
- Whether respondent's institution is publicly or privately controlled (see Appendix B, Question 17). Respondents selected public or private (Arpan, 2003; Brounley, 2010).
- The type of institution that employs the respondent (see Appendix B, Question 18). Respondents could choose from six answers such as two-year institution or doctoral/research university (Arpan, 2003; Brounley, 2010).

- The enrollment of the respondent's institution (see Appendix B, Question 19). Respondents could choose from six answers within a range from fewer than 2,500 students to more than 50,000 students (Arpan, 2003; Brounley, 2010).
- The athletic conference to which the respondent's institution belongs (see Appendix B, Question 20). Respondents were given an open-ended option for the question (Arpan, 2003).

To test Hypothesis 1, t-tests were run to see whether there were any statistical differences between the communication tasks (see Appendix B, Question 2; Appendix C, Table C1) performed by communication offices of colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* (see Appendix B, Question 9) compared to the communication tasks performed by offices of colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200.

To test Hypothesis 2, a chi-square test was run to see whether there were any statistical differences in the responses given by respondents whose institutions were ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* (see Appendix B, Question 9) compared to those whose institutions ranked between 21 and 200 to the questions about their leaders informing them of the importance they place on rankings (see Appendix B, Question 10; Appendix C, Table C5), how frequently they perform various communication tasks (see Appendix B, Question 2; Appendix C, Table C1), in which media they purchase advertising (see Appendix B, Question 3; Appendix C, Table C7), and whether their office has a strategic communication plan (see Appendix B, Question 5; Appendix C, Table C6). These four questions relate to the CASE principles of maintaining a presence in the inner management circle, supporting the institution's strategic plan, and using multiple communication channels to reach multiple audiences.

To answer Research Question 1, crosstabs were used to see the breakdown of answers to several questions in the survey: how would you rate these goals (specifically the goal of raising awareness among peer institutions to improve the ranking of your university in college rankings) as priorities to your communications office (Appendix B, Question 1); indicate the importance of these audiences (specifically the audience of administrators who fill out the *U.S. News & World Report* peer reputation survey) of your communication efforts (Appendix B, Question 4); and do your institution's leaders inform you about the importance they place on *U.S. News & World Report* rankings (Appendix B, Question 10).

Results

The survey was emailed to the 1,625 CASE members identified by their job titles as working in communications and marketing at U.S. higher-education institutions. Responses were recorded from 179 respondents, a return rate of 11.02%. See Table 2 for demographic characteristics. The results were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. The total number of respondents in the survey was higher for colleges ranked between 21 and 200 than for those ranked in the top 20, which was expected considering the much wider range in the lower ranking.

Table 2

Respondent demographic characteristics

Category

<i>(n=159)</i>	<u>Public</u>	<u>Private</u>
Institutional control	50%	50%

<i>(n=159)</i>	<u>Two-year Baccalaureate</u>		<u>Master's level</u>	<u>Doctoral/research</u>	<u>Specialized</u>
Institution type	6%	18%	28%	46%	2%

<i>(n=157)</i>	<u>Less than</u>	<u>2,500-</u>	<u>5,000-</u>	<u>10,000-</u>	<u>25,000-</u>	<u>50,000+</u>
	2,500	4,999	9,999	24,999	49,999	50,000+
Student enrollment	25%	12%	12%	22%	23%	6%

(n=136)	<u>NCAA Division I</u>	<u>NCAA Division II</u>	<u>NCAA Division III</u>
Athletic conference	45%	17%	29%

(n=167)	<u>Centralized</u>	<u>Decentralized</u>
Office location	62%	38%

(n=130)	<u>Under</u>	<u>\$50,000-</u>	<u>\$100,000-</u>	<u>\$500,000-</u>	
	<u>\$50,000</u>	<u>\$99,999</u>	<u>\$499,999</u>	<u>\$999,999</u>	<u>\$1 million+</u>
Annual budget	19%	15%	42%	15%	9%

(n=99)	<u>Top 20</u>	<u>21-50</u>	<u>51-75</u>	<u>76-100</u>	<u>101-150</u>	<u>151-200</u>
<i>U.S. News</i> ranking	29%	20%	14%	14%	15%	7%

(n=168)	<u>1-3</u>	<u>4-6</u>	<u>7-10</u>	<u>10+</u>
Number of staff	37%	24%	21%	18%

Hypothesis 1 predicted that communication offices of colleges and universities that are ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* use similar communication methods – such as distributing news releases and media pitches, producing print and online magazines, posting content on social media platforms, and sending email messages – that communication offices of colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 also use. Analysis of the survey data using t-tests found that communicators at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 did not differ

significantly from communicators at colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 on their use of communication methods, supporting Hypothesis 1 (see Appendix C, Table C1).

Responses suggest communicators may be aware of what communication methods other communicators use and base their own communication efforts on this knowledge. The answers to several questions show a consistent similarity of activity among communication offices that supports the idea of modeling as described in mimetic isomorphism, for example in magazine production and social media use. One open-ended response to a question about what communicators do to try to improve their school's ranking supports this notion: "We track where competitive schools advertise and how they craft their mission."

In the comparison of which communication tasks their offices perform and how frequently they perform them, based on the means for the entire group of respondents (Figure 1), posting social media content was the activity performed most frequently on a 7-point scale from 1 "never" to 7 "daily." An analysis of communication tasks performed by communicators at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 compared to those ranked between 21 and 200 showed similar results (Figure 2).

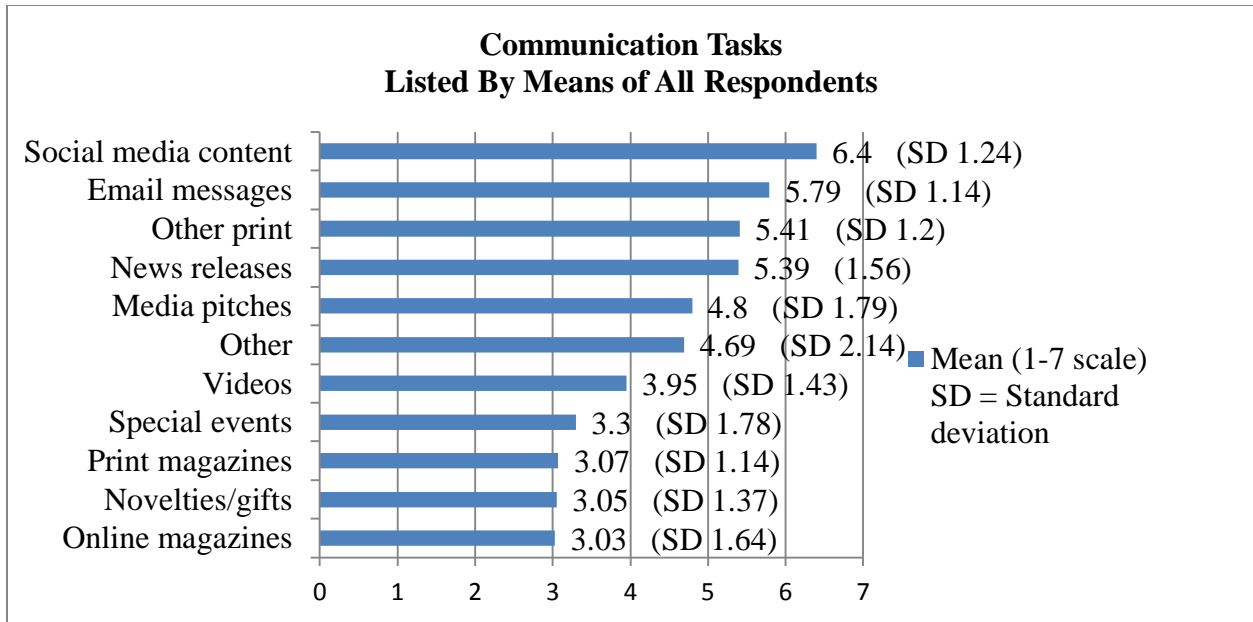


Figure 1. Communication tasks in order of the frequency performed.

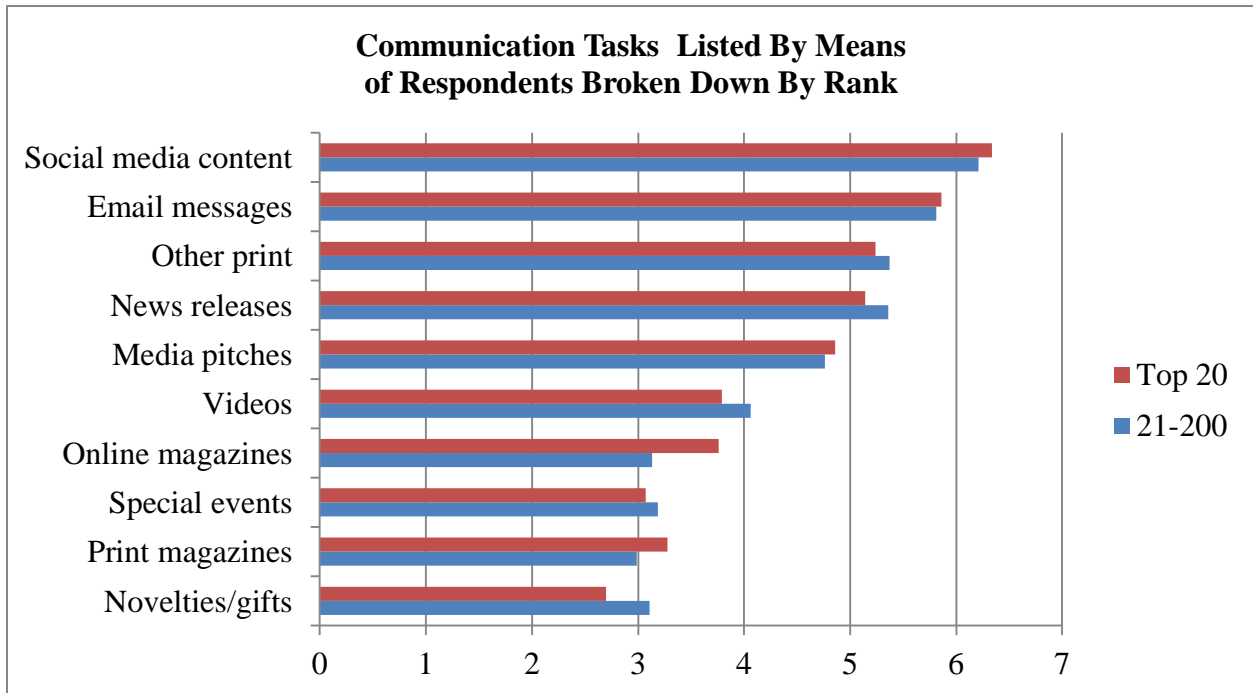


Figure 2. Communication tasks listed by means of respondents broken down by rank. See Appendix C, Table C1 and Table C2 for additional statistical analysis.

There was only one significant difference between the two groups when they rated the importance of audiences, suggesting additional support for Hypothesis 1 (see Appendix C, Table C4). When rating 13 different audiences, the only significant difference was in the rating for the audience of employers of graduates with a significance level of .037. Colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 by *U.S. News* considered that audience more important than did colleges and universities ranked in the top 20. Based on the means for the entire group of respondents (Figure 3), alumni and donors were rated as the audiences that were most important on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 “not important at all” to 5 “very important.” An analysis of audience importance as rated by communicators at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 compared to those ranked between 21 and 200 showed similar results (Figure 4).

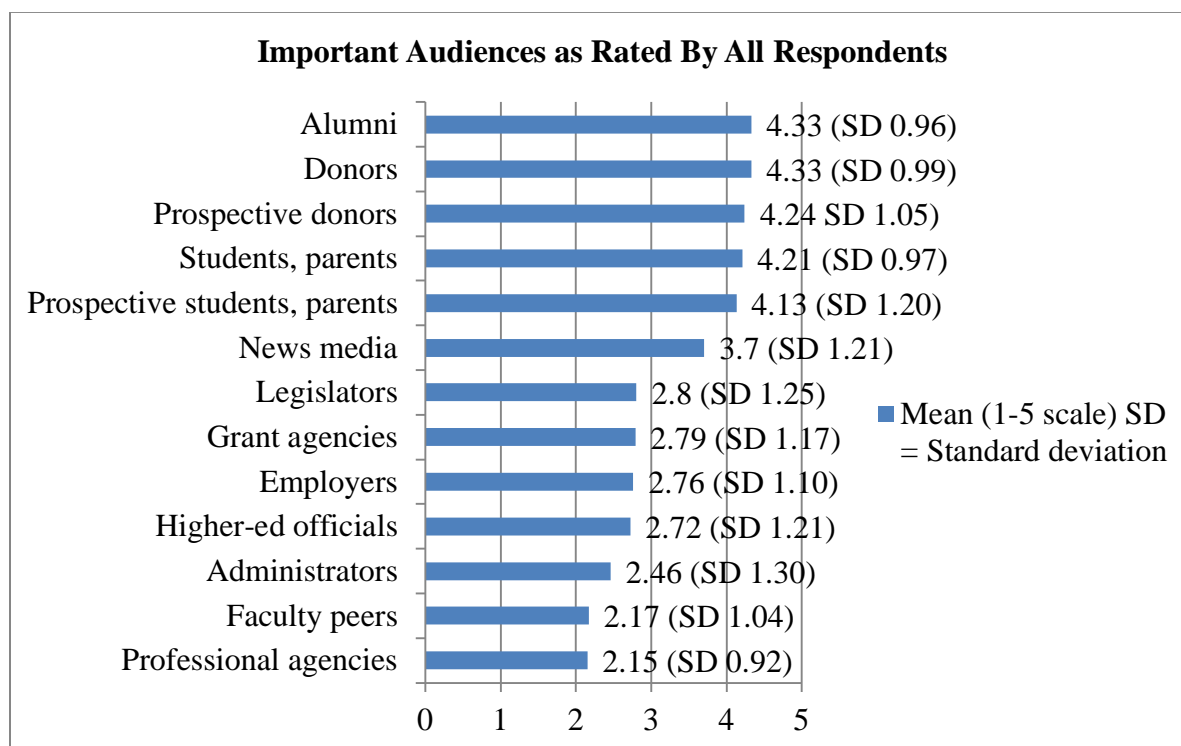


Figure 3. Audiences rated in order by all respondents. See Appendix C, Table C3 for additional statistical analysis.

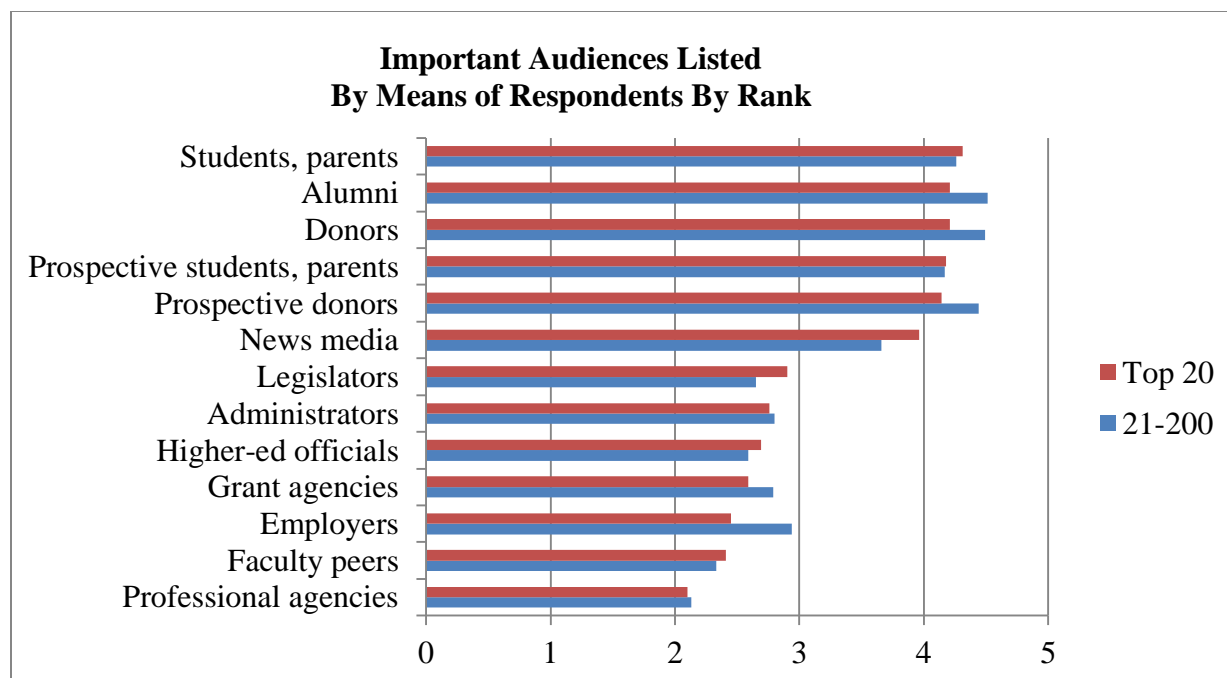


Figure 4. Audience ratings broken down by rank of the institution. See Appendix C, Table C4 for additional statistical analysis.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that communication offices of colleges and universities that are ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* follow similar operational principles outlined by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for communications and marketing professionals at educational institutions – such as maintaining a presence in the inner management circle, supporting the institution’s strategic plan, and using multiple communication channels to reach multiple audiences – that colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 also follow. Communicators at top 20 ranked institutions followed operational principles outlined by CASE to the same extent that communicators at institutions ranked below 20 followed them, according to the analysis of questions related to the principles. These findings support Hypothesis 2.

To test Hypothesis 2, chi-squares and t-tests were used to compare the responses of colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News* to the responses of colleges and

universities ranked from 21 to 200 based on important CASE principles of practice. One of the CASE principles states that communication and marketing professionals are most successful at advancing their institutions when they are present in the inner management circle. A chi-square test found no significant difference between colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 and colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 in answer to the question of whether their leaders inform them of the importance of the *U.S. News* rankings (see Appendix C, Table C5). More colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 answered yes to the question of whether their institution's leaders inform them of the importance of rankings but the difference was not statistically significant (Figure 5).

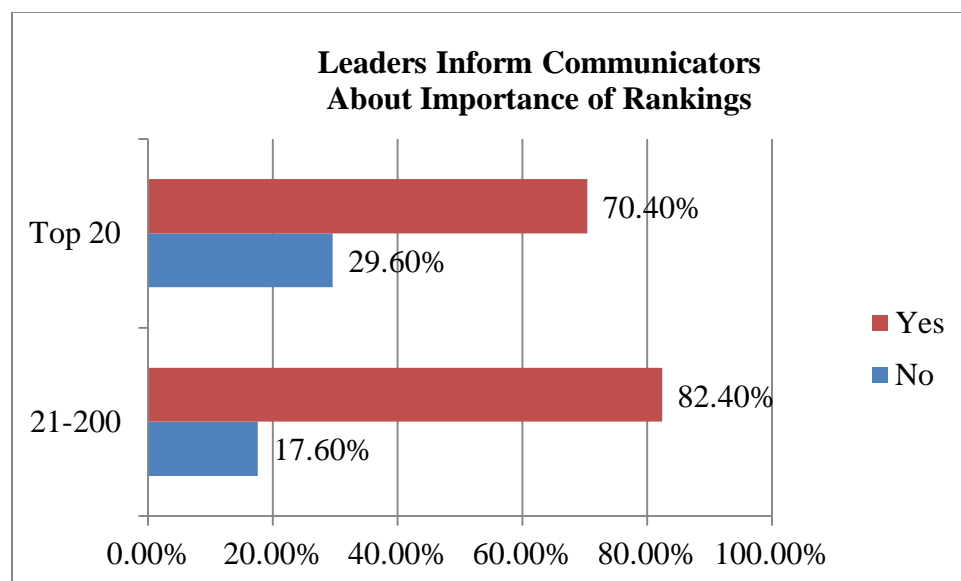


Figure 5. Leaders inform communicators of importance of rankings

Another CASE principle states: Communications and marketing professionals are most successful at advancing their institutions when their efforts are carefully designed to support the institution's strategic plan. A chi-square test found no significant difference between colleges

and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News* and colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 in answer to the question of whether their office has a strategic plan (see Appendix C, Table C6). More colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 answered yes to the question of whether they have a strategic communication plan but the percentage was higher for institutions ranked in the top 20 (Figure 6); the difference was not statistically significant.

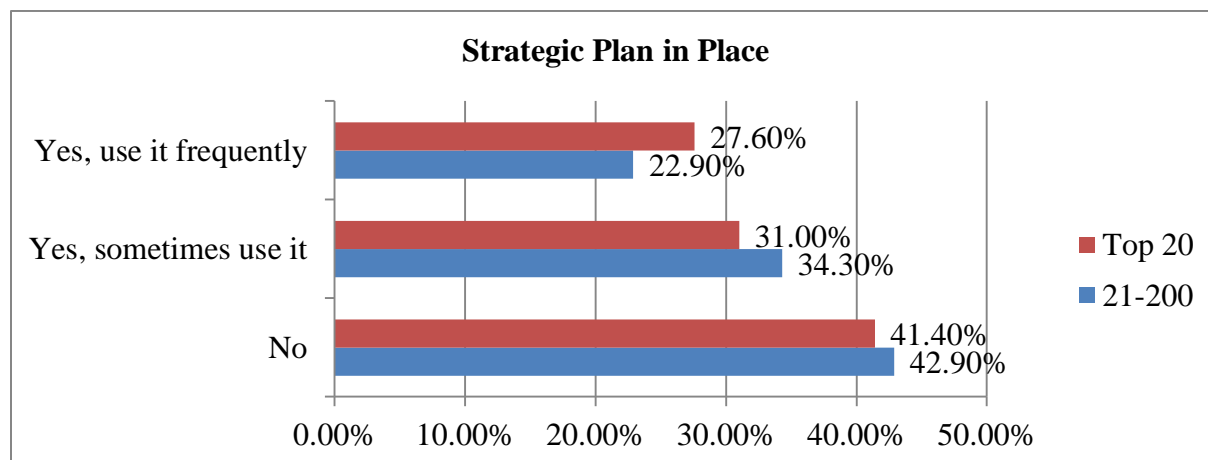


Figure 6. Strategic plan in place

Another CASE principle states: Communications and marketing professionals are most successful at advancing their institutions when they undertake ongoing, targeted programs of communications and marketing, employing multiple channels appropriate to the audience and message. T-tests found no significant difference between colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News* and colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 in their responses to the question about communication tasks performed and their frequency. Based on the means for the entire group of respondents, posting social media content was the activity performed most frequently (see Figure 1 and Appendix C, Table C2) on a 7-point scale from 1 “never” to 7 “daily.”

A chi-square test found no significant difference in the media in which communicators at top-20 ranked colleges and universities purchase advertising compared to communicators at

colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 (see Appendix C, Table C7). Newspaper was the medium in which advertising was purchased by most respondents. Among top 20-ranked institutions (n = 29), 13 or 44.8% purchased advertising in newspapers, and among the institutions ranked between 21 and 200 (n = 70), 40 or 57.1% purchased advertising in newspapers.

T-tests found only one significant difference between the two groups when they rated the importance of audiences (see Appendix C, Table C4). Colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 by *U.S. News* considered the audience of employers of graduates more important than did colleges and universities ranked in the top 20. Among all respondents, alumni and donors were rated as the audiences that were most important on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 “not important at all” to 5 “very important” (see Figure 4 and Appendix C, Table C3).

Research Question 1 asked whether there were any important differences between universities ranked in the top 20 and universities ranked between 21 and 200. Previous analysis showed only one statistically significant difference between the two groups out of a possible 70 different measures. The crosstabs used to explore this question broke down the respondents by their ranking and their athletic conference. The first question examined was the one about which goals were priorities of the communication offices. Only 3 respondents rated raising their ranking as their top priority; 100% of those who chose it as the top priority were Division 1 schools ranked between 21 and 200 by *U.S. News*. Fifteen respondents rated raising their ranking as among their top three priorities. Twelve, or 80% of the total, were ranked between 21 and 200 and the other 3, or 20%, were ranked in the top 20. Ten respondents, or 66.6% of the total, were in Division 1. Overall, respondents ranked between 21 and 200 were more likely to rate raising awareness to improve their *U.S. News* ranking as more of a priority than respondents in the top

20. This finding suggests that lower-ranked schools are more concerned with the *U.S. News* ranking process than schools ranked in the top 20 (see overall responses in Appendix C, Table C8).

Frequencies and crosstabs were also run on respondents who listed administrators who vote in the *U.S. News & World Report* reputation survey as a very important audience of their communication efforts. Overall, 15% said *U.S. News* voters are a very important audience and 24% said this audience is more important than other audiences. Broken down by ranking and athletic conference, more schools ranked between 21 and 200 considered this audience most important than did the schools ranked in the top 20. In Division 1 athletic conferences, 7 respondents, or 77.7% of the total, were ranked between 21 and 200, and 2, or 22.2% were ranked in the top 20. None of the Division 2 schools chose administrators as a very important audience, and for both Division 3 and the category of “other” 1 school ranked between 21 and 200 listed the *U.S. News* voter audience as very important and zero schools ranked in the top 20 listed it as very important. Of the total of 11 respondents who said the *U.S. News* audience was very important, 81.8% of the total were ranked between 21 and 200 and the remaining 18.2% were ranked in the top 20. The findings were similar among respondents who said the *U.S. News* audience was more important than other audiences. Of the total of 16 respondents, 10 or 62.5% of the total were ranked between 21 and 200, and the other 6, or 37.5% were ranked in the top 20. Again, more lower-ranked schools chose a response that suggests they are more concerned with rankings than schools in the top 20. The only statistically significant difference in the results – that colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 by *U.S. News* considered the audience of employers of graduates more important than did colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 – suggests that these schools may not be able to rely on the rankings to help their

graduates find jobs as much as the top-ranked schools can. Officials at some schools believe a high ranking gives their graduates an advantage with employers so the lower-ranked schools may need to compensate by taking a more aggressive approach marketing themselves to employers (Corley & Gioia, 2000).

A third question examined for this research question asked whether leaders inform communicators about the importance they place on *U.S. News* rankings. Frequencies showed that nearly 58% of the respondents said yes. Analysis by crosstabs showed 76.9% of those were ranked between 21 and 200 and the other 23.1% were ranked in the top 20. Broken down by athletic conference, in Division 1, 78.1% were ranked between 21 and 200 and 21.9% were ranked in the top 20; in Division 2, 83.3% were ranked between 21 and 200 and 16.7% were ranked in the top 20; in Division 3, 75% were ranked between 21 and 200 and 25% were ranked in the top 20; in the category of other, 71.4% were ranked between 21 and 200 and 28.6% were ranked in the top 20. These results suggest that leaders at lower-ranked schools are more likely to discuss the importance of rankings with their communication officers than are leaders of schools ranked in the top 20.

Communication in person was the most frequent way leaders inform their communicators about the importance of rankings. Of the total of 17 respondents who described that form of communication, 12 or 70.6% were schools ranked between 21 and 200 and 5 or 29.4% were ranked in the top 20.

When asked what pieces their communication offices distributed to try to improve their school's ranking, schools ranked between 21 and 200 reported distributing more pieces (see overall responses in Appendix C, Table C9). More schools ranked between 21 and 200 than schools ranked in the top 20 sent pieces in 22 categories; more schools ranked in the top 20 than

schools ranked between 21 and 200 sent pieces in the remaining two categories (Figure 7).

Among all types of communication pieces, at least half and in many cases all were produced by schools in Division 1 athletic conferences.

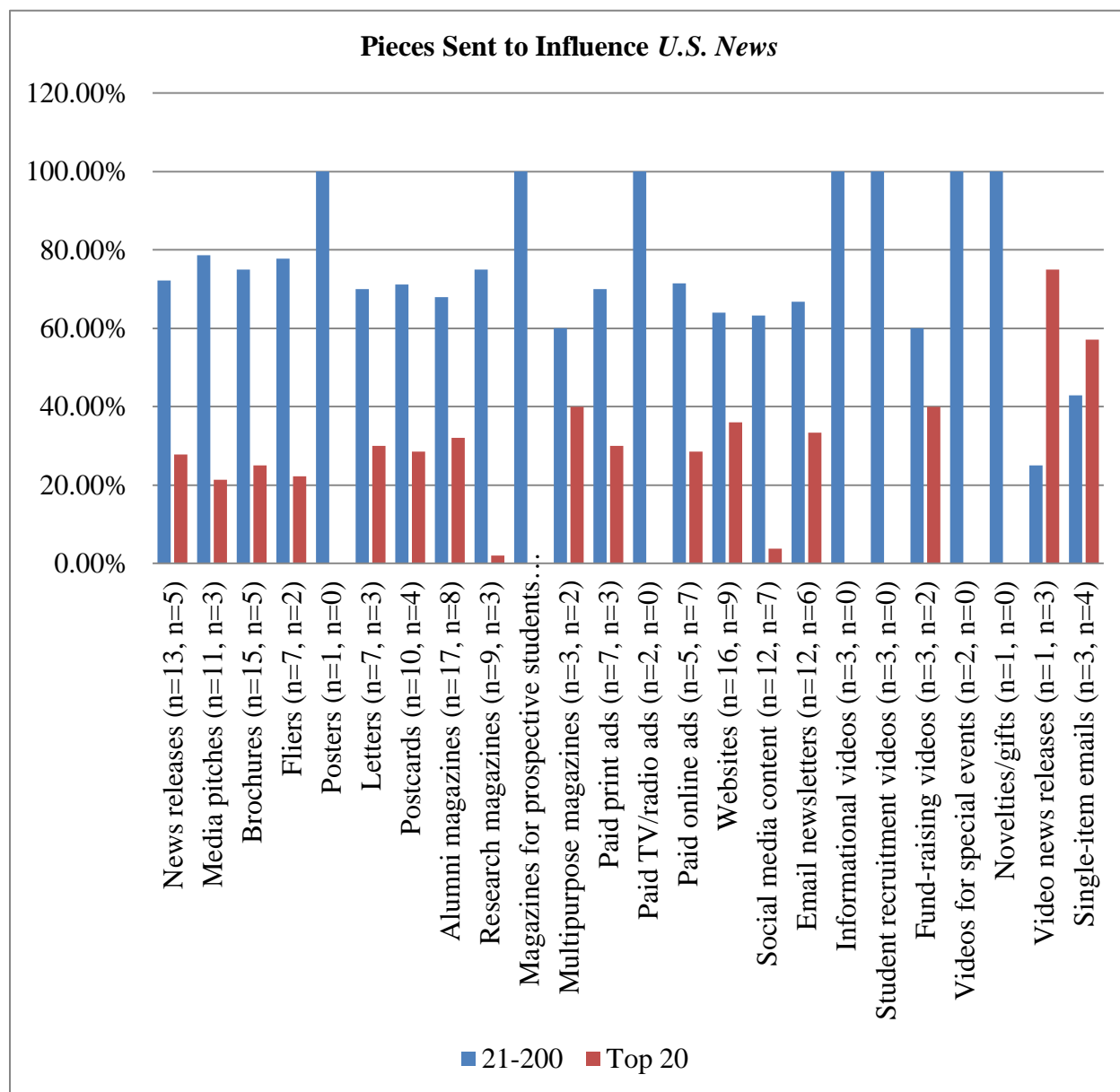


Figure 7. Pieces sent to improve *U.S. News* ranking

To the question about whether these pieces were effective in raising the school's ranking, the majority answered that they didn't know. The frequencies were don't know, 59 or 81.9%;

yes, 8 or 11.1%; and no, 5 or 6.9%. Of the 8 that said the pieces were effective, 3 were ranked in the top 20 and 5 were ranked between 21 and 200. What follows are three profiles of respondents who answered that question in the affirmative:

- A communicator for a private, master's college or university ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* with enrollment between 5,000 and 9,999 students that is in a Division 3 athletic conference said the pieces they distributed were effective because they saw "increases in (the) reputation score." That school ranked enrollment growth as the top priority of its communication office with raising awareness to improve its ranking one priority among many. The only daily communication task reported was posting social media content while weekly communication tasks listed were news releases, media pitches, online magazines, and other (unspecified). The school purchased advertising in regional, state and national newspapers, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, regional television, websites, social media, and Google. It listed six audiences as very important to its communication office but did not include the administrators who vote in the *U.S. News* reputation survey, an audience it ranked as more important than other audiences. The centralized communication office with six employees and an annual budget between \$100,000 and \$499,999 has a strategic plan that it only refers to sometimes. Its leaders inform the communicators about the importance of rankings by discussing the ranking process, and the pieces distributed by the office to try to improve the school's ranking are print news releases, media pitches, postcards, alumni magazines, research magazines, print ads, and websites. The communicator, who listed a job title of vice president for

external affairs, also reported efforts to support donor participation and to encourage discussion of retention and graduation rates.

- A communicator for a public, master's college or university ranked between 151 and 200 by *U.S. News* with enrollment between 10,000 and 24,999 students that is in a Division 2 athletic conference said the pieces they distributed were effective "because we made it to the list for the first time last year." The school ranked public awareness of the institution as its top priority for the communication office with raising awareness to improve its ranking one priority among many.

Communication tasks performed daily were issuing news releases, posting social media content, and sending email messages, and the only weekly task identified was sending media pitches. The school purchases advertising in local and state newspapers, on local radio, websites, social media, online radio, and in movie theaters. It listed eight audiences as very important and said the *U.S. News* voters were an audience that is more important than other audiences. The centralized communication office with 12 employees and an annual budget between \$100,000 and \$499,999 has a strategic communication plan but only refers to it sometimes.

The institution's leaders inform the communicators about the importance of rankings through personal conversations. Pieces produced to try to improve the ranking were listed as print news releases, media pitches, brochures, alumni magazines, postcards, online ads, websites, and social media. The communicator listed a job title of communications and marketing director.

- A communicator for a public, doctoral/research institution ranked between 151 and 200 by *U.S. News* with enrollment between 25,000 and 49,999 students that is

in a Division 1 athletic conference said the pieces distributed were effective because they “raised awareness of our institution.” The school did not rank any goals as a top priority of its communication office and listed enrollment growth, fundraising, and public awareness of the institution as among its top three priorities. Daily communication tasks performed were sending news releases, media pitches, other print pieces, social media, and special events. Monthly tasks were sending email messages and producing videos. It purchases ads in national newspapers, on television in a major metropolitan market, and on websites. It listed six audiences as very important and described *U.S. News* voters as being as important as other audiences. The centralized office with 25 employees and an annual budget of \$100,000 to \$499,999 does not have a strategic communications plan. Its leaders inform communicators of the importance of rankings during meetings. Pieces it has distributed to try to improve the institution’s ranking are print news releases, media pitches, brochures, fliers, postcards, posters, alumni magazines, research magazines, student magazines, print ads, TV ads, websites, social media content, and email newsletters. The communicator listed associate vice president of university relations as job title.

Discussion

Institutional theory suggests the communication practices of communicators at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* will be similar to the practices of communicators at schools ranked between 21 and 200 because the two groups face similar formal and informal pressures that shape their organizations. Results of the survey done for this study support that theory and contribute to the substantial literature about institutional theory by adding data about the field of college and university communication not previously available. Institutional theory identifies a process called isomorphism to describe the effect of these pressures on organizations, and the results of this survey suggest isomorphism is one explanation for the similarities found in the field of communication. Responses to numerous questions posed to communicators who are members of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) about their communication practices were found to be similar regardless of the respondent's institution's student enrollment, control, type, ranking, and athletic conference or their communication office's budget, employee total, and location within the institution. Communicators at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* did not behave differently than communicators at colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200, according to analysis of the survey data, as would be expected in institutional theory. Of 70 possible measures on which the two groups were compared, they differed significantly on only one, their rating of the importance of the audience of employers of graduates. Colleges and universities ranked between 21 and 200 by *U.S. News* considered that audience more important than did colleges and universities ranked in the top 20. The two groups did not employ different communication methods or prioritize their office goals differently to

any statistically significant extent, regardless of their demographic characteristics from the size of their student body to the amount of money spent each year on communication efforts.

In the Ashworth et al. (2007) research, the extent of voluntary copying of other local government authorities regarded as high performing is indicative of the presence of mimetic isomorphic pressures. This finding is mirrored in my survey of communicators, who report using similar communication methods and activities. Pitts et al. (2010) concluded that organizations in the same field gradually adapt to the same norms and implement programs because peer organizations seem to think they are socially necessary. This same end result was found in my study of college and university communicators, suggesting that they adapt to the same norms, for example, of using multiple communication methods to reach multiple audiences. Ashworth et al. (2007) cite the formation of benchmarking clubs by local governing councils and the creation of a Beacon Council to recognize the best performing councils and to spread best practices. Their finding relates, in my study, to the operation of CASE and its emphasis on guiding principles for communication professionals. Because the findings suggest communicators don't differ significantly in their practices based on their ranking, it can be assumed, like the governing councils in the Ashworth et al. (2007) study, communicators recognize their best performing peers and adopt their best practices with the help of organizations such as CASE.

This paper explores some of the possible isomorphic pressures on the field of college and university communications or public relations through the use of specific questions on the survey administered to CASE-member communicators. These pressures include the *U.S. News* rankings and the ethical and operational principles established by CASE. Previous research and popular press accounts have examined the effect of rankings on colleges and universities (Argetsinger, 2002; Bastedo & Bowman, 2009; Brennan, et al., 2007; Lederman, 2009; Machung, 1998;

Sauder & Fine, 2008; Standifird, 2005; and Stevens, 2007), but none was found that examined the communicators' possible efforts to influence the rankings. Other research has explored the impact of professional associations and their operating guidelines and principles on their fields (Paea, 2012; and Valentine & Barnett, 2003), and research has examined how colleges and universities differ in various aspects: faculty compensation (Alexander, 2001); mission statements (Morphew & Hartley, 2006); and general education requirements (Warner & Koeppel, 2009).

Of these related subjects, the least research effort has been devoted to the specific activities of communication offices at colleges and universities, and the two primary pieces published on the subject that this researcher found were not published in peer-reviewed journals. Brounley (2010) wrote about the results of a University of Florida and CASE collaboration that surveyed CASE communicators about their strategic communication efforts, but that study did not ask specifically what communication practices the communicators were using. Marketing firm Lipman Hearne also collaborated with CASE (2010) to survey CASE members about their spending on marketing and communications. Their survey included information on specific communication activities (Lipman Hearne, 2010) but did not provide detail such as the audiences targeted by communicators and how improving *U.S. News* rankings figured into their efforts.

One limitation of the study described in this paper was the low response rate to some questions about the rankings. Because of those low responses, combined with the Brounley (2010) and Lipman Hearne (2010) findings that formal measurement programs to quantify effectiveness of communication activities are lacking in higher education, this study suggests a difficulty in assessing effectiveness of communication activities. Tools such as audience surveys may be useful in determining effectiveness of communication pieces. However, determining how

best to assess effectiveness is beyond the scope of this research and a good topic for future research.

It is assumed that communicators seeking to help their institutions move up in the rankings model their communication activities after other colleges and universities having success in the rankings in the hope that such actions will also raise their ranking, according to institutional theory. That the results of this survey show communicators produce many of the same types of communication pieces suggests they do pay attention to what their peers are doing. However, another limitation of this study is that the survey did not ask communicators whether they monitored the activities of other communicators. Asking this question could have provided more support for the effect of mimetic isomorphism in which organizations react to the uncertainty of the ranking process by copying other organizations.

Another limitation is suggested by the research (Pitts et al., 2010) in which information about whether a school superintendent held a doctoral degree and the number of years since completion of the highest degree was gathered to see how those factors affected behavior. Having additional data about the degrees held by communicators and how long they have been working in the field could have allowed additional comparisons to see whether communicators with similar backgrounds behaved in similar ways.

In my study, limitations of the survey prevent more definitive statements about the communicators' motivation, but institutional theory suggests the pressures created by the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings and CASE principles provide the communicators' motivation for following these norms.

Questions I might have considered adding to the survey include these about observance of or interaction with other communicators, educational background, professional history, and

motivation for choosing various communication practices. The question about whether an institution's leaders inform communicators about the importance they place on *U.S. News* rankings could possibly have provided more useful information if it were worded to find out specifically what the administrators said, such as whether they say improved rankings should be pursued or whether they say rankings should be ignored.

Another limitation is that the survey does not provide information to suggest precisely which forms of isomorphism may have the most influence in the area of college and university communications or public relations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The *U.S. News & World Report* rankings are not expected to go away any time soon, which means many communicators will continue to face pressure from their institutions to consider ways to influence the rankings as part of their communication efforts. In my survey, response rates were much lower to questions related to *U.S. News* rankings than to other questions, suggesting communicators are reluctant to discuss their responses to the rankings and their efforts to influence them. Questions about the rankings were placed toward the end of the questionnaire because, in addition to being about a sensitive topic, it was believed they would be more difficult to answer than those pertaining to the day-to-day operation of a communications office (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Some insight comes from the open-ended questions about the rankings. Only a handful of communicators gave an answer to the question asking why they thought some communication pieces were effective in improving their institution's ranking. One of those top 20 respondents was a private, master's college with between 5,000 and 9,999 students who said their office views improving rankings "as a secondary (but intended) benefit of efforts to improve quality metrics, i.e. retention, graduation, and alumni giving." The respondent works for a centralized communications office serving the entire campus and reported having "strategic conversations" with the institution's leaders about the importance of rankings.

When asked what else they did to try to influence the *U.S. News* ranking of their institution (n = 66), about a third of the answers were negative with 19 respondents writing in they didn't know, didn't care, or the rankings were not a focus of their efforts. Of those 19, 4 indicated they were ranked in the top 20, 5 indicated they were ranked between 21 and 200 and the other 10 did not answer the ranking question. One of the top 20 respondents said they are

“not focused on improving the ranking because of the methodology.” Another one said they don’t try to improve the ranking because they have “more than enough applicants.”

Other answers to this question suggest that rankings are a part of the overall practice of communicators at higher-education institutions. Some communicators view improving rankings as a secondary benefit of their communication efforts. “Improving our rankings is never the sole purpose of any of our communications, but our hope is that our efforts will have an influence,” said one respondent who didn’t answer the question about their school’s ranking. Another respondent, who works for a school ranked between 76 and 100, said: “We strive to produce communications that are relevant, meaningful and useful to our internal and external audiences. Producing quality, targeted communications for our audiences might have the ancillary benefit of raising our visibility and reputation as measured by the *U.S. News* methodology, but that’s not why we produce our communications as we do. Our audiences’ needs come first.” Another respondent, who works for a school ranked in the top 20, said: “We haven’t done anything else that we wouldn’t also have done in pursuit of our other strategic objectives. We believe that what we do to strengthen the reputation of our university with our audiences will benefit us with *U.S. News* raters as well.”

The low response to the question about effectiveness of pieces intended to influence the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings also suggests a challenge in assessing effectiveness of communication pieces in general. More research needs to be done that can give communicators more tools to assess effectiveness and to share with each other information about the pieces they find to be effective in communicating with various audiences and why. Isomorphic pressure, by definition, particularly in the case of mimetic isomorphism, causes organizations to act in a certain way because others are doing so (Powers, 2000), and not because of any evidence of

effectiveness or efficiency. More research must be done to determine the best use of communicators' time, effort, and resources.

Future research may be able to offer more definite answers on which forms of isomorphism may have the most influence in the area of college and university communications or public relations. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) say that more than one of these three processes – coercive, mimetic, or normative isomorphism – may occur at the same time. The questions about motivation, interaction with other communicators, and educational and professional background might give a future researcher information to determine whether coercive, mimetic, or normative isomorphism have the greatest effect on communicators. The survey showed that college and university communication professionals can gain legitimacy through any of the three types, within the regulative pillar by following the rules to be considered in the ranking process of the *U.S. News & World Report* such as calculating and submitting figures on graduation rates, research spending, and alumni giving; the normative pillar by complying with standards internalized through the CASE ethical and operational principles such as maintaining a presence in the inner circle of leadership and promoting the institution's mission; and the cognitive pillar by performing the same communication tasks as other communicators such as printing magazines and brochures and maintaining a presence on social media platforms.

Conclusion

This study examined what differences exist between the work of public relations professionals who are members of CASE, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, at colleges and universities ranked in the top 20 by *U.S. News & World Report* and CASE-member communicators at colleges and universities that are ranked between 21 and 200. It examined their behavior in four areas: (1) communication goals they consider top priorities, (2) types of communication tasks they perform, (3) types of media in which they purchase advertising, and (4) their rating of audience importance. A survey completed by CASE-member communicators at colleges and universities found very little difference between the two groups in these four areas.

This study contributes a more complete picture of modern public relations work at colleges and universities than can be found currently in the research literature. It builds on institutional theory by suggesting that what is happening today in the field of public relations at higher-education institutions may be explained by the premises of institutional theory including isomorphic pressure and legitimacy. Because of the similarities among institutions of higher learning (Atkinson, 2008) and the competition for students (Klassen, 2000), communicators will be most successful in reaching audiences with the most effective messages when they have more information about which methods are being used to the greatest impact by their peers. By asking communicators what they do, why they do it and who they are trying to reach, this research may be the beginning of a deeper understanding of highly effective communication practices at colleges and universities.

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Appendix A: Principles of Practice for Communications and Marketing Professionals at Educational Institutions*

Education at all levels has never been more essential to the well-being of the global community. Yet educational institutions face an increasingly challenging environment in which to attract students, faculty, and benefactors, as well as to earn alumni allegiance, government support, and public respect. As a result, communications and marketing professionals perform strategic and complex roles as champions of the institution's mission, stewards of its reputation, monitors of its competitive environment, and liaisons to its many constituencies. The principles below are intended to assist them in fulfilling those roles in a manner that will benefit their institutions, their profession, and the academic community as a whole.

Ethical Principles

Communications and marketing professionals have a fundamental obligation to:

- Advance the mission of their institutions in an ethical and socially responsible manner.
- Reflect in their work the basic values of educational institutions, including an abiding respect for diverse viewpoints and a firm commitment to the open exchange of ideas.
- Reinforce through words and actions the principles of honesty, integrity, and trust, which form the basis for long-term, supportive relationships with the institution's publics.
- Place the welfare of the institution above personal gain, avoid conflicts of interest, take responsibility for their decisions, and treat colleagues and the public with courtesy and respect.

Operational Principles

Communications and marketing professionals are most successful at advancing their institutions when:

- Their efforts are carefully designed to support the institution's strategic plan, to manage its reputation, and to monitor those issues most likely to affect its future.
- They are present in the inner management circle, where they provide strategic and crisis counsel to the institution's leadership, convey the viewpoints of primary publics, and participate in the formulation of policies affecting those publics.
- They base their work on research that informs their understanding of the institution's primary publics and that measures progress toward established goals, expressed in terms of desired attitudes and behaviors among those publics.
- They undertake ongoing, targeted programs of communications and marketing, employing multiple channels appropriate to the audience and the message.
- They engage in two-way communication with primary publics and actively seek feedback to help the institution align its services with existing and emerging needs of its intended beneficiaries.
- They involve internal constituencies across the organization in delivering not only the messages but also the academic and service excellence on which the institution's reputation depends.
- They employ proven methods, as well as promising new approaches in the field, as part of a commitment to continuous improvement.

* Adopted by the CASE Board of Trustees in July 2004. These principles are intended to supplement and complement the CASE Statement of Ethics adopted by the CASE Board of Trustees in 1982.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Survey for college and university communicators

This survey is designed to gather information about the work done by communications professionals at colleges and universities. There are a total of 22 questions. It should take 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, you may request a copy of the summary report to be emailed to you.

For the purpose of this survey, the term "communications office" applies whether one communications professional or more than one communications professional is employed in it.

Question 1

How would you rate these goals as priorities to your communications office?

Choices: Not at all a priority, a minor priority, one priority among many, among our top three priorities, the top priority

To support growth in enrollment

To support fund-raising

To raise public awareness of your institution

To raise awareness of your unit among the campus as a whole

To raise awareness among peer institutions to improve the ranking of your university in college rankings

To inform legislators and other policymakers and agencies that provide funds and make regulations concerning higher education

Question 2

How often does your communications office perform the following tasks or functions?

Choices: Never, less than one time a year, once or twice per year, once or twice a semester, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, daily

Write news releases

Send media pitches

Produce print magazines

Produce online magazines

Produce other print pieces such as brochures, fliers, posters, postcards

Post social media content

Produce email messages

Produce videos

Organize special events

Produce novelty items/gifts; please describe

Other; please specify

Question 3

In which of the following does your communications office purchase advertising? Select all that apply.

- Newspaper; please specify level, e.g. campus, statewide, national
Chronicle of Higher Education
- Other higher education outlets; please specify name and medium, e.g. *Inside Higher Education* magazine and/or website
- Journals of professional academic associations; please specify name and medium, e.g. *Journal of Athletic Training* magazine and/or website
- Television and radio; please specify medium and level, e.g. campus, statewide, national
- Websites
- Social media, e.g. Facebook
- Other; please specify name and medium
- None

Question 4

Indicate the importance of these audiences of your communication efforts.

Choices: Not important at all, somewhat important, as important as other audiences, more important than other audiences, very important

- Alumni
- Employers of your graduates
- News media
- Legislators
- State higher education officials
- Donors
- Prospective donors
- Students and parents
- Prospective students and parents
- Grant-funding agencies
- Professional agencies
- Faculty at peer institutions
- Administrators who fill out the *U.S. News & World Report* peer reputation survey
- Other; please specify

Question 5

Does your communications office have a strategic communications plan?

- Yes, and we refer to it regularly
- Yes, but we only refer to it sometimes
- Yes, but we rarely refer to it
- We are in the process of creating a plan
- No
- Don't know

Question 6

How many people are employed as full-time professional communications staff in your communications office? Do not include administrative support employees or student workers in your total count.

Question 7

What is your communications office's annual budget? Do not include salaries.

- Under \$50,000
- \$50,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 to \$999,000
- \$1 million+
- Don't know

Question 8

I am responding on behalf of:

- A centralized communications office serving the entire campus
- A decentralized communications office serving a single unit (e.g., business school, medical school)

Question 9

What is the current ranking of your institution in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of all national institutions (this includes both public and private institutions)?

- Top 20
- 21-50
- 51-75
- 76-100
- 101-150
- 151-200
- Unranked
- Don't know

Question 10

Do your institution's leaders inform you about the importance they place on *U.S. News & World Report* rankings?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Question 11

How do your institution's leaders let you know about the importance they place on the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings?

Question 12

What pieces has your communications office distributed to try to improve your school's ranking in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings? Select all that apply.

- Print news releases
- Video news releases
- Media pitches
- Brochures
- Fliers
- Posters
- Letters
- Postcards
- Alumni magazines
- Research magazines
- Magazines for prospective students
- Multipurpose magazines
- Paid print advertisements
- Paid television/radio advertisements
- Paid online advertisements
- Websites
- Social media content
- Single-item email messages
- Email newsletters
- Informational videos
- Student-recruitment videos
- Fund-raising videos
- Videos for special events
- Novelty items/gifts; please describe
- Other; please specify
- None

Question 13

Were those communication pieces effective in improving your school's ranking?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Question 14

Why were they effective?

Question 15

What else, if anything, did your office do to try to improve the ranking?

Now, we would like to ask you a few questions about you and your institution.

Question 16

What is your job title?

Question 17

Is your institution public or private?

Public

Private

Question 18

What is your institution type?

Two-year institution

Baccalaureate college

Master's college or university

Doctoral/research university

Specialized institution (e.g., stand-alone law school)

Tribal college

Question 19

How many students are enrolled in your institution?

Fewer than 2,500

2,500 to 4,999

5,000 to 9,999

10,000 to 24,999

25,000 to 49,000

More than 50,000

Don't know

Question 20

To what athletic conference does your institution belong?

Appendix C: Survey Results

Table C1

T-tests: Tasks that communication offices perform

Communication tasks	<u>Rank top 20</u>		<u>Rank 21-200</u>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>sig</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
News releases	5.14	1.787	5.36	1.524	-.632	96	.529
Media pitches	4.86	1.959	4.76	1.715	.266	97	.791
Print magazines	3.28	1.306	2.99	1.173	1.083	97	.282
Online magazines	3.76	1.845	3.13	1.349	1.879	96	.063
Other print pieces	5.24	1.215	5.37	1.353	-.448	97	.655
Social media content	6.34	1.370	6.21	1.512	.401	97	.689
Email messages	5.86	1.217	5.81	1.040	.198	97	.844
Videos	3.79	1.449	4.06	1.295	-.891	97	.375
Special events	3.07	1.624	3.19	1.836	-.297	97	.767
Novelty items	2.70	1.613	3.11	1.260	-1.245	81	.217

Table C2

Tasks that communication offices perform

Total response by category and frequency by mean

Task	Never	Less than 1 time per year	1-2 times per year	1-2 times per semester	1-2 times per month	1-2 times per week	Daily	Freq. by mean
Social media	2	6	1	4	7	34	123	6.40
Email message	2	0	5	10	47	58	55	5.79
Print, other	3	1	5	19	68	45	36	5.41
News releases	11	2	4	16	38	64	39	5.39
Media pitches	20	2	18	11	51	50	24	4.80
Produce videos	14	14	31	4	57	10	5	3.95
Special events	45	21	22	36	38	8	7	3.30
Magazines, print	31	7	65	65	8	0	0	3.07
Novelties, gifts*	28	26	31	42	21	2	0	3.05
Magazines, online	55	7	36	48	20	6	4	3.03

*Novelty item descriptions: Miscellaneous items 23, unspecified items 13, pens 11, T-shirts 9, water bottles 5, posters 4, enrollment/admissions marketing 4, policing logo use 3, tote bags 2, gifts for donors 2; Other category – responses not included in tables because of low total number: Websites 12, e-newsletter 5, speech-writing/executive communications 5, internal communication (includes email) 4, paper products 2, crisis communication 1, reports to funders 1, photography 1, banners/signs 1, annual reports 1, blogs 1

Table C3

Communication offices' rating of audience importance

Total responses by category and frequency by mean

Audiences	Not important to somewhat important	As important as others	More important than others to very important	Mean (1-5 scale*)
Alumni	10	23	136	4.33
Donors	11	22	137	4.33
Students, parents	10	29	130	4.24
Pros. students, parents	23	18	127	4.13
News media	30	48	91	3.70
Legislators	78	45	46	2.80
Grant agencies	74	50	46	2.79
Employers	79	48	42	2.76
State higher ed. officials	79	51	40	2.72
<i>U.S. News</i> survey respondents	93	38	39	2.46
Faculty at peer institutions	110	42	18	2.17
Professional agencies	112	46	11	2.15

* Responses collapsed into three categories for statistical analysis

Table C4

T-tests: Communication offices' rating of audience importance

Audiences	<u>Rank top 20</u>		<u>Rank 21-200</u>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>sig</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Alumni	4.21	1.114	4.51	.779	-1.525	96	.130
Employers of graduates	2.45	.948	2.94	1.102	-2.113	97	.037
News media	3.96	1.290	3.66	1.178	1.134	96	.259
Legislators	2.90	1.372	2.65	1.233	.871	96	.386
State higher education officials	2.69	1.257	2.59	1.222	.382	97	.703
Donors	4.21	1.048	4.49	.794	-1.443	97	.152
Prospective donors	4.14	1.060	4.44	.828	-1.533	97	.129
Students, parents	4.31	.930	4.26	.896	.266	97	.791
Prospective students, parents	4.18	.983	4.17	1.188	.018	95	.985
Grant-funding agencies	2.59	1.119	2.79	1.062	-.838	97	.404
Professional agencies	2.10	.900	2.13	.867	-.130	97	.897
Faculty at peer institutions	2.41	.867	2.33	1.086	.375	97	.708
<i>U.S. News</i> survey respondents	2.76	1.272	2.80	1.292	-.146	97	.884

Table C5

Chi-squares: Do leaders inform you of rankings' importance

Leaders inform	<u>Rank top 20 (n = 27)</u>		<u>Rank 21-200 (n = 68)</u>		X^2	df	p
	#	%	#	%			
Yes	19	70.4	56	82.4	1.670	1	.196
No	8	29.6	12	17.6			

Table C6

Chi-squares: Does communication office have a strategic plan?

Strategic plan	<u>Rank top 20 (n = 29)</u>		<u>Rank 21-200 (n = 70)</u>		X^2	df	p
	#	%	#	%			
Yes, use it frequently	8	27.6	9	22.9	.265	2	.876
Yes, sometimes use it	9	31.0	24	34.3			
No	12	41.4	30	42.9			

Table C7

Chi-squares: Media in which communication offices purchased advertising

Advertising purchases	<u>Rank top 20 (n = 29)</u>		<u>Rank 21-200 (n = 70)</u>		X^2	df	p
	#	%	#	%			
Newspaper	13	44.8	40	57.1	1.250	1	.264
<i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>	4	13.8	7	10.0	.299*	1	.585
Other higher education outlets	4	13.8	3	4.3	2.821*	1	.093
Professional academic journals	2	6.9	2	2.9	.863*	1	.353
TV and radio	9	31.0	28	40.0	.704	1	.401
Websites	11	37.9	28	40.0	.037	1	.848
Social media	9	31.0	28	40.0	.704	1	.401

*Includes cell(s) with expected count less than 5

Table C8

Rating of goals as priorities to communications office

Total responses by category and frequency by mean

Goals	Not a priority to minor priority	One priority among many	Among top 3 priorities to top priority	Mean (1-5 scale*)
Public awareness	10	31	135	3.88
Fund-raising	16	34	126	3.76
Enrollment	40	28	76	3.44
Campus awareness	82	64	30	2.61
U.S. News ranking	74	72	30	2.61
Inform officials	43	59	33	2.55
Other**	8	8	11	2.89

* Responses collapsed into three categories for statistical analysis

** Other: Alumni engagement 6, student retention and success 3, image among campus as whole (same as selection 4 in survey) 2, awareness among funders (same as selection 6 in survey) 2, image to employers of graduates 1, manage crisis communications 1, promote institution's strategic goals 1, quality communication materials 1, inform in specific content area 1, overall image 1

Table C9

Communication pieces distributed to influence U.S. News ranking

Communication piece	Response	Percentage
None	77	52%
Alumni magazines	40	27%
Brochures	34	23%
Print news releases	31	21%
Websites	32	21%
Email newsletters	28	19%
Social media content	28	19%
Media pitches	25	17%
Postcards	20	13%
Letters	17	11%
Paid print advertisements	15	10%
Research magazines	14	9%
Fliers	13	9%
Multipurpose magazines	13	9%
Single-item email messages	9	6%
Fund-raising videos	9	6%
Other; please specify*	9	6%
Student-recruitment videos	7	5%

Video news releases	6	4%
Magazines for prospective students	5	3%
Informational videos	5	3%
Videos for special events	4	3%
Posters	3	2%
Novelty items/gifts	2	1%

* Other: Annual report 1, banners 1, university magazine 1, strategic plan, 1, inauguration materials 1

