

**SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST? THE REBRANDING
OF WEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION**

EXCERPT: FRONT MATTER

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ABSTRACT

During the years 1996 to 2005, West Virginia produced the greatest proportion (56.25%) of regionally accredited institutional rebrandings. In addition, the state experienced the greatest proportion (25%) of the specific “college-to-university” rebranding strategy than any other state. This study set out to discover the reasons why West Virginia produced such a high percentage of “college-to-university” changes. Using a mixed method approach of analysis, the researcher used quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the rationale, strategies, and implications of the college-to-university change.

As West Virginia was viewed as a nested population in Appalachia, a population of 51 institutions that experienced the college-to-university change located in 10 states containing Appalachian counties was generated. Administrators from these schools were surveyed and the returns provided a basis for interviews of West Virginia administrators. Additionally, 103 institutions in the United States that rebranded as universities were analyzed in regard to effects of the rebranding five years following the change. The variables studied included the following: enrollment, tuition, Carnegie Classifications, the numbers and types of graduate programs, and undergraduate selectivity.

The study focused on the rebrandings at the following West Virginia institutions: The University of Charleston (1979), Salem Teikyo University (1989), Wheeling Jesuit University (1996), West Virginia University Institute of Technology (1996), Mountain State University (2001), Concord University (2004), Fairmont State University (2004), Shepherd University (2004), West Virginia State University (2004), Ohio Valley University (2005), and the planned changes at West Liberty State College. This dissertation features information concerning the rationale for change, how the change was realized, the relationship of the change to regulatory bodies, reactions by stakeholders to the change, the effect of the change upon enrollment, the implications of institutional prestige, and administrative advice regarding the change. In addition, a case study on retaining an institutional brand was conducted of the “Allegheny” higher education brand and its usage among institutions in Appalachia was included. This case study examined how Allegheny College has protected its brand and gained brand dominance in the wake of the rebranding efforts of other institutions.

To understand the rebranding phenomenon, a total of 22 individuals were interviewed, 34 administrators returned surveys, and an additional 48 individuals provided information specific responses. A total of 102 unduplicated respondents participated in this study and these included: past and present university administrators, institutional staff, researchers, governmental representatives, alumni, accreditation liaisons, and educational consortia staff.

DEDICATION

In every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future. – Alex Haley (n.d.)
You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them. – Bishop Desmond Tutu (n.d.)

First, I dedicate this work to my wife, Pam, and my daughters, Lora and Kristen who unselfishly allowed me to finish this project over the last several years. They have been great. Never did they complain about me being away gathering research and conducting interviews. Nor did they complain about the living room becoming a reference resource room, although, Pam was glad to see all of the books, papers, and other sundry items finally boxed up and stored away. I thank my family for their unwavering support in this process, which simultaneously occurred during a year at work when my job responsibilities and workload increased five-fold. This often caused me to work late evenings and many weekends. As the girls started seeing printed copies of this work, finally they stopped asking, “What’s a dissertation?” You all are truly wonderful.

Second, I dedicate this work to my mother, Genevieve B. Akerberg, and my late father, Charles E. Owston. My mom and dad were the only ones in their immediate families to graduate high school. In turn, they wanted even more for their three sons. They saw the value of a college education and wanted us to have this opportunity. They promised that the three of us would get at least four years of college and we all did. All of us have overachieved by going beyond just one college degree. Two of us now also have doctorates. While my father only lived to see one of us enter college, Mom continued to make our education possible even when it did not seem financially feasible. It was a great sacrifice for her to leave home every evening and work to accomplish this goal. Thanks Mom for believing in us in the first place and for being one of my greatest cheerleaders as I was writing this – always advising, “Jim, just get it done.” Well Mom, I finally did.

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Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire. – William Butler Yeats (n.d.)
You are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad. – Festus to Paul, Acts 26:24 NASB

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college to a graduate school in 10 years is unprecedented. I learned more in the three years that I served as your executive assistant than I could have discovered in reading hundreds of texts. Thanks for your continued support.

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