

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

**EXCERPT: CHAPTER TEN: RESULTS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS – A CONCLUSION**

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## CHAPTER TEN: RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – A CONCLUSION

*The end may justify the means as long as there is something that justifies the end – Leon Trotsky (n.d).  
This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning –  
Winston Churchill (n.d).*

This final chapter provides a summary of this research study and outlines its purpose, population, method, findings, implications, and recommendations for further study. A look at institutional branding, especially from a standpoint of the “college-to-university” name change, became of great interest to this researcher. The great proliferation of this type of institutional rebranding appears to be, as Morphew (2000) reported, on the rise. By analyzing quantitative data within a context of qualitative research, it was hoped that an information-rich document would result. Such a study could be beneficial to administrators considering similar institutional changes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

From 1996 to 2005, 532 of the 3,036 regionally accredited institutions in the U.S. experienced at least one rebranding. Eighteen of West Virginia’s 32 regionally accredited institutions rebranded during this same period. By number alone, West Virginia ranked ninth in the United States; however, by proportion, West Virginia had a larger percentage (56.25%) of institutional rebrandings than any other state in the nation.

One specific type of institutional rebrand is the “college-to-university” change. Of the 532 rebranded institutions in America, 151 became universities. In West Virginia, eight of the 32 regionally accredited institutions assumed university status. By number, West Virginia ranked fourth nationally, by percentage, however, West Virginia was the number one ranked state in the country with university rebrands. This study set out to discover if there were factors unique to West Virginia (e.g., demographic, social,

economic, etc.) that could explain the proliferation of “college-to-university” rebranding in the state.

### **Populations**

Since West Virginia is the only state that lies completely within Appalachia, the study investigated this rebranding strategy in 10 states that contained counties that are designated as being part of Appalachia – West Virginia being a nested population of the larger region of study. The study analyzed five distinct variables as they related to the “college-to-university” change at 103 schools that rebranded as universities from 1996 to 2001. Finally, six schools with a similar brand name were compared to study brand confusion, protection, retention, and dominance. Therefore, four distinct populations exist:

- A statewide population consisting of 10 West Virginia schools that became universities from 1979 to 2005 and one that is currently in the transition process. Therefore, a total population of 11 West Virginia institutions was included in the study.
- A regional population consisting of 51 institutions that rebranded as universities. These schools represented 10 states that contained counties that are designated as being part of Appalachia.
- A national population that consisted of 103 institutions that became universities from 1996 to 2001. The entire population was studied.
- Six institutions that utilized the Allegheny brand during 1996 to 2007. The entire population of schools using this geographic brand were analyzed.

## Methods

A mixed method approach, using both quantitative and a variety of qualitative data collection processes, was employed in this study. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) compared mixed method research to a fisherman's having two flawed nets. The holes in the nets represented the weaknesses found in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By overlapping the nets, the weak areas from one net are compensated by the strength of the other net. Mixed method research, thus, uses overlapping techniques that strengthen the entire research project.

In addition, a postmodern theoretical perspective was used for this study and concentrated largely on administrative decisions. As Reason and Bradbury suggested, the postmodern perspective “emphasizes the intimate relationship between knowledge and power, how knowledge-making, supported by various cultural and political forms, creates a reality which favours [sic] those who hold power” (2001, p. 6). The majority of the decisions to rebrand the institutions in this study began as the effort of one individual – usually the chief executive officer (CEO) or president. In Georgia, however, the system chancellor effected the change at 13 institutions.

In addition, Brustad (1997) characterized the postmodern research perspective as one that “emphasizes sociohistorical and cultural analyses and the need for integrative, inclusive, and dynamic approaches to knowledge” (p. 87). By utilizing a mixed method approach, it was possible to integrate a variety of data; by having a contextual knowledge of the dynamics of the situation, a greater understanding of the phenomenon can be achieved.

Slife and Williams (1995) characterized postmodern researchers as storytellers who treat the collective human experience and interpret it in context. Sometimes the interpretation may serve only to understand the “story” at its given moment. Future interpretations may be different, as the contexts will change. Within the higher educational context of 2007, it was the desire of this “researcher/storyteller” to provide the situational aspects of the various institutions chronicled.

The documentation of numerous events concerning these schools, both historically and in recent years, revealed the human element in decisions, actions, and eventual consequences. Some of these stories, to the author’s knowledge, have never been published and are now preserved. The particular research methods examining these phenomena were executed in three phases and are described in further detail below.

### ***Phase One: Initial Information Gathering***

It was necessary in the study of the “college-to-university” phenomenon and institutional rebranding in general to construct a list of regionally accredited institutions in the United States. Similar to the efforts by Spencer (2005) in his study of institutional name changes, this list was careful not to include entities that were not regionally accredited. For example, Spencer included institutions that were regionally accredited, nationally accredited, specially accredited, branch campuses under the jurisdiction of another institution’s accreditation, schools and colleges within a university, and statewide governing boards. In other words, Spencer took the lists of all institutional changes as was reported in the *HEP (Higher Education Publications) Higher Education Directories* (Rodenhouse, 1993-2002) in toto.

Using a similar approach to Spencer's (2005), this study eliminated all institutions that were not institutionally accredited at the regional level. Therefore, institutions holding national or special accreditation, which greatly enlarged Spencer's list and contributed to his conclusions, were eliminated. Because they fell under the institution's main campus' regional accreditation, branch campuses and schools and colleges within universities were eliminated. The master list was constructed from the *HEP Higher Education Directories* (1997-2006) and was compared to the membership lists of the six regional accrediting bodies (Rodenhouse, 1997-2002; Burke, 2003-2006).

### ***Phase Two: Quantitative Processes***

A population was constructed from a list of rebranded institutions from states that included counties designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission as part of Appalachia. Of the 13 states, three were eliminated: West Virginia, because it was further addressed in Phase Three; New York, as the only qualifying institution dropped the "university" designation a few years after its adoption; and Mississippi, because it had no qualifying institutions. Surveys including Likert scales, rankings, checklists, and open-ended questions were sent to administrators at all 51 colleges that became universities within the designated region during the years 1996-2005. A series of three mailings produced a return of 34 surveys or 66.67%. Quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS software package for statistics, and qualitative data (i.e., responses to open-ended questions) were later incorporated into Phase Three.

Since the survey data relied upon individual perceptions, as do all survey data, additional quantifiable measures were sought to determine if significant effects of the rebranding could be documented. A total population of 103 schools that became

universities from 1996 to 2001 were studied. Using methods similar to Koku's (1997) study on enrollment at institutions making a strategic name change, data for five variables (i.e., enrollment, tuition, Carnegie classifications, number and types of graduate programs, and undergraduate selectivity) were collected and analyzed using SPSS. Two variables strictly followed Koku's method and included incremental changes in enrollment and incremental changes in tuition.

The incremental analysis compared the mean growth/loss five years prior to the name change to five years after. Since the remaining variables did not change as frequently and information was not available for the five years prior to the name change at a number of institutions, three variables analyzed differences from the year of the change to five years after the change. These variables included the number and type of graduate and professional degree programs, Carnegie Foundation classifications, and undergraduate selectivity.

Data were gathered using the *HEP Higher Education Directories* (1992 to 2007) for enrollment, tuition, and Carnegie classification. Institutional catalogs from the change year and five years post-change were used to count the number of graduate and professional programs. These programs were prorated by using the hierarchy employed by the U.S. Department of Education for degree and certificate programs. Scores were assigned accordingly by combining numbers and classification rankings for each school. Undergraduate selectivity was also analyzed and data were collected from *U.S. News and World Reports: America's Best Colleges* (1998 to 2008). These volumes provided selectivity data from two years prior to the publication dates (i.e., the 1998 edition included 1996 data). All data were analyzed using SPSS.

### ***Phase Three: Qualitative Methods***

Using the quantitative results and qualitative responses from the surveys as outlined in Phase Two, questions were developed for the subsequent qualitative portion of the study. Several qualitative methods were employed to provide triangulation. These included observation, historical research, and direct interviews with institutional administrators.

***Naturalistic observation.*** The researcher had a unique perspective as a complete participant and a complete observer. Johnson and Christensen (2000) define the complete participant as taking “on the role of an insider, essentially becoming a member of the group being studied” (p. 149). Having handled the institutional marketing during the year of his home institution’s name change, the researcher had a distinct view regarding the specifics of an institution’s rebranding.

The complete observer views phenomena from outside the group being studied (Johnson and Christensen, 2000). As a complete observer, the researcher was employed as a member of the media or in higher education in West Virginia (or both) during the years 1977 to 2005. The researcher has been employed by three West Virginia institutions, graduated from four West Virginia institutions, and has taken classes on the campuses of two other schools within the state – both of which are a part of this study. Additionally, the student is a graduate of another Appalachian regional school (located in Kentucky) that experienced the “college-to-university” change.

As a student of higher education leadership, the researcher has a network of contacts at most institutions located within West Virginia. This afforded the researcher even greater insight on the amount of rebranding that has occurred in West Virginia. For

a further understanding of institutional culture and branding, the researcher visited 21 West Virginia campus locations, six Pennsylvania campus sites, two institutions each in Virginia and Massachusetts, and one institution each in Ohio and Maryland. For historical context, the researcher visited locations of five defunct institutional campus sites: one in Pennsylvania and four in West Virginia (two of these campuses were later secured by newer institutions and are currently operational).

***Historical research.*** To understand the events as they unfolded, the researcher employed historical research using documentation regarding the rebranding processes at the institutions in question. These included, but are not limited to, the following: newspaper articles and editorials, institutional publications and materials (administrative, faculty, and board minutes), accreditation documents (self-study reports and institutional statements of affiliation), periodicals, legal documents, governmental documents (bills, reports, and the *State Code*), current and archived radio and television broadcasts, active and archived web sites, and published histories.

***Interviews.*** The greater portion of the material gathered for this study came from interviewing individuals who were directly and indirectly involved in the administration and or governance of West Virginia's higher educational institutions. As survey and historical data were being collected, it became evident that to understand dynamics *not* present in West Virginia, interviews with administrators in Georgia and Pennsylvania needed to be conducted. Additionally, representatives from institutions in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the six regional accrediting bodies, consortia, and governmental agencies were contacted. Snowball sampling occurred as interview subjects occasionally suggested other knowledgeable parties to be interviewed.

Interviews were two-fold: complete interviews and partial (one to three question) interviews. The longer interviews were conducted with 22 individuals representing institutions, governing boards, consortia, and the state legislature. Three interviews were conducted via telephone. Two on-site interviews occurred with two subjects each, while the remaining 15 interviews were conducted on-site with only one interview subject. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. The West Virginia interviews included representatives from all 11 West Virginia institutions in this study.

The shorter interview questions were directed to a number of other individuals who had specific information not known by the subjects in the longer interviews. The vast majority of additional information was gathered via email (24); however, face-to-face (17) and telephone interviews (6) secured the required information. One individual responded via the postal system. A handful of individuals were contacted more than once for further information. A total of 48 individuals provided additional information germane to this study. The number of individuals contributing information to this study (including 32 non-duplicated survey participants) totaled 102.

### ***Synthesis***

The study conformed to Duke and Beck's (1999) recommendation of an alternative style that would provide an "opportunity [to develop] skills that will actually be beneficial to students in the long term" and proposed that "each 'chapter' of the dissertation would have its own abstract, introduction, literature review, research question(s), methodology, results, and conclusions – it would be a self-contained research article manuscript ready to be submitted for publication" (pp. 183-184). As materials were gathered, seven general themes emerged and these are represented in Chapters 2

through 8 in this study. While not all possible themes were investigated, some related legislation and regulation, such as the semester system change in Georgia and the community college emergence in West Virginia, were necessary to explore as both had an impact on the overall effectiveness of the “college-to-university” change.

Finally, there were no good examples in West Virginia of how institutions could protect their own institutional brands. While conducting background research, the story of Allegheny College in Meadville, PA emerged several times. It was thought to include this institution’s experience within context of this research to explore the issues of brand protection. Interviews and historical research into Allegheny’s four experiences of brand interloping by other institutions produced a case study on this one particular brand name, which was included as Chapter 9.

### ***Limitations***

While the survey instrument addressed the reactions of a number of stakeholder groups, the researcher did not address the reactions of students. Student reactions at several of these schools were noted through historical documents; however, a complete analysis in the area of “student reactions” was not possible.

The researcher desired to interview two representatives of the West Virginia State Legislature. Both were to be high-ranking officials, one from the House of Delegates and one from the State Senate. Having known one legislator both personally and professionally, the researcher interviewed this one individual who filled a number of key leadership roles. Although an example of convenience sampling, the selection of this individual on the basis of his background was logical. In searching for a person from the

other chamber of the legislature, a ranking member was identified through the suggestion of a member of West Virginia's executive branch. Although agreeing to participate, this legislator was unavailable to be interviewed during the entire time of the data collection. Although the one interview was very insightful, it only represented the thoughts of one legislator and represented only one side of the legislative chamber.

As with all survey results, there is a tendency for participants to respond in a socially desirable manner (Johnson and Christensen, 2002). According to Fowler (1995), there is a "tendency for respondents to distort answers in ways that will make them look better or avoid making them look bad" (p. 28). With this in mind, some of the responses may not be entirely accurate.

Within the highly competitive environment of West Virginia higher education, two administrators were concerned with the researcher's relationship to Marshall University. Two administrators were cautious and one emphasized that he would not participate unless the researcher verified that he was not going to present the subject's institution negatively in an attempt to enhance Marshall University's (MU) reputation. The researcher assured both subjects that his role as a Marshall University student would have no bearing on how any institution would be characterized in this study. In the few times Marshall University was referenced, the author made every effort to treat the school with impartiality. Any platitudes or derision of Marshall or of any MU administrators came from the comments of the interview subjects and not the researcher.

Finally, the researcher's own employment at an institution within the study, may have influenced responses. While a number of the interview subjects had met the researcher in the past, the researcher did not reveal his employment situation to

previously unknown subjects unless specifically asked. Several of the subjects had positive comments regarding the researcher's place of employment; however, most comments were deemed as simple courtesies without any substantial research value. Other comments were based on an actual observation and were necessary for inclusion in the document to support a point. With exception of comments by two individuals that the researcher considered as actual observations, the majority of these remarks were omitted.

One administrator, who knew the situation, used the opportunity to joke about the researcher's institution; however, this was not viewed negatively, as it was obvious that it was an example of a "good natured ribbing" among competitors in the same business. This actually ended up being the longest and most thorough of the 22 interviews that were conducted. Another administrator, who did not know the researcher's employment situation, actually made very pointed and negative comments concerning the author's home institution; however, this was the exception and not the rule. These comments served no purpose to the study and were largely ignored.

A third administrator, fearful that the researcher would focus on author's employer at the expense of other West Virginia institutions, noted on the informed consent form that his participation was contingent "with the understanding that the researcher is from one of the institutions in the study." Cognizant of the potential for bias, the researcher attempted to prevent any such favoritism from occurring. The study limited the focus on the researcher's own institution; however, certain unique aspects of the name change were included as these added to the overall body of knowledge and represented an important part of this study. It is hoped that in the characterization of his

own institution, the author followed the paraphrased instructions given by Oliver Cromwell to artist Peter Lely: “paint my picture . . . warts [and all]” (Martin, 2007; ¶ 3).

## **Research Questions and Results**

### ***Question 1: What factors precipitated the “college-to-university” change?***

The primary reason for rebranding as a university was to signify an institution’s existing status. This finding emerged from the institutional surveys, an analysis of graduate programs at 103 institutions, and through interviews with administrators.

For the 34 institutions represented in the surveys, administrators ranked their responses to the primary reasons for making the change. The data categories were collapsed, responses were prorated, and point values were assigned to all categories. Of the five most significant categories relating to the reason for the change, “to reflect the institution’s current status” had the greatest point value at 140 points. The other top reasons included a) “to define the future mission of the institution” (78 points); b) “to increase institutional prestige” (72 points); c) “to increase enrollment” (40 points); and d) “to enhance the school’s international reputation” (32 points).

Through an analysis of the numbers and types of graduate programs at 103 institutions in the U.S., inferences may be drawn to indicate the purpose for these schools’ adoption of the university designation. Because many of these institutions already had graduate programs and then added more within five years of the change, it may be inferred that a large number of these schools adopted the university name to reflect their existing status.

With West Virginia's loss in overall population, including the demographic containing traditional, college-aged students, it was assumed that many of the institutions in the state changed names in order to become more competitive. By comparing the number of institutions per capita with surrounding states, it appears that West Virginia is saturated with educational institutions (see Chapter 1). While several interview subjects acknowledged this, they also indicated that this issue appeared to have no bearing on the decision to move to university status. If institutional competition was assessed as being a primary motivating factor, the "college-to-university" change would have been an effort to survive. Data collected from interviews and other documentation indicated that for most schools, this was not the case. Only three schools were in survival mode at the time of the change to university status. One institution poised itself for what it hoped to become, and the remaining six schools changed names to reflect what they had already become.

Although enrollments were low during the decade of the 1990s, this situation turned around for many schools in West Virginia. One legislator explained,

[There] has been this tremendous success in the area of higher education in terms of the number of students going to and accessing higher education. They weren't doing that a half a generation or a generation ago. There were a bunch of reasons for this. A number of them may be things like the PROMISE Scholarship, the increase in grant funding – the scholarships that aren't merit based, and obviously the change in West Virginia's economy, which ties into the community college issue.

***Question 2: What was the administration's justification for the university designation?***

For the most part, entry into graduate education was the primary justification. This was mentioned by a number of the interview subjects. In several of cases, only one graduate or professional degree was necessary to qualify to become a university. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission requires only one graduate program as part of the qualifications for “university status.” Second to this was an organizational structure that followed a traditional university pattern of several schools or colleges under the university structure. Two administrators felt that an organization comprising a minimum of two schools or colleges was sufficient to justify the university designation even without any graduate programs. Only one person, a legislator, suggested that research activities may need to be conducted as justification for a university mission. Schools that had neither a graduate degree program nor a university structure justified the university name through a comparison to similar institutions within their regions that already had adopted the university designation. These institutions were in a minority.

There were several additional reasons administrators in West Virginia justified their schools' being called universities. One of these was to align the school with the current definition of the term “university” and thus conform to accepted practice. Of the entire membership of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2006), 90% of the member institutions were already designated as universities. Another justification was to better position the university brand outside of West Virginia. Since the term “college” was used for secondary schools in most of the world, the “university” designation would be more attractive to international students. Related to this issue was the tendency for some community colleges to drop the “community” designation and thus

appear equal to four-year colleges. By adopting “university,” the name sent a message to prospective students that the four-year school was of a higher status. Finally, it was felt that the “university” designation had the potential to benefit the local economy.

***Question 3: What was the institution’s strategy for the rebranding process?***

Several areas of strategic planning emerged from the survey data and the interviews. These included implementing structural changes related to the university organization, exercising care in the choice of names, and calculating accurately the amount of time required for the change. While not experienced by all institutions that rebranded as universities, one strategy was to align the institution with a university model by establishing several schools or colleges. One danger that The University of Charleston (UC) experienced was an overzealous model that overextended the institution’s resources. UC’s organization contained seven schools each with its own dean, which one administrator recalled, “We had one dean for every 100 students. It was an incredible bureaucracy . . . There were terribly high administrative budgets – top heavy.” A smaller and more manageable model would likely have served the institution better.

The most visible aspect of the “college-to-university” change was the choice of name. The majority of the schools (53.06%) made a minor-simple change by just replacing “college” with “university.” In West Virginia, these included Concord College rebranding as Concord University and Fairmont State College being renamed as Fairmont State University.

The second largest group of schools (34.01%) experienced a minor-complex change. This type of change retained the primary identity of the school, but additional changes occurred with the addition of the “university” designation. Some examples from the survey institutions included North Georgia College becoming North Georgia College and State University and Cumberland College rebranding as the University of the Cumberlands.

Finally, a minority of schools (12.93%) abandoned the old brand for a completely new identity. From the list of 103 rebranded universities from 1996 to 2001, examples included Pacific Christian College rebranding as Hope International University and Rosary College’s transition to Dominican University.

There was an advantage in retaining the old brand as it required less of a financial commitment than other rebranding strategies. Additionally, inferences could be drawn (although not supported by quantitative data) that stakeholder acceptance was greater when the existing institutional identity was retained.

There were times when a complete rebrand was seen as necessary. Stakeholder involvement in the decision helped this type of change become more palatable to the school’s constituents. The College of West Virginia’s complete rebranding as Mountain State University is an example of the involvement of faculty and staff in the name selection. This was viewed as a positive move, whereas other institutions with little or no stakeholder involvement experienced greater difficulty in this process.

The time commitment for the rebranding averaged at 22 months. It was also noted that this time was probably indicative of the actual implementation of the change and not the entire time spent in planning for the change. Where planning data were

available, the estimated time was considerably shorter than the actual time. This is consistent with time commitments at other schools.

***Question 4: What procedures did administration use to implement the change?***

As indicated from the survey data and the administrative interviews, brand implementation and its financing emerged as important considerations when planning. Several implementation strategies were employed by West Virginia rebranded institutions. The institutions followed one of the six name change strategies identified by Kaikati and Kaikati (2003). These included the following strategies: phase in/phase out, combined branding, translucent warning, sudden eradication, counter takeover, and retrobranding.

The “Phase in/Phase out” strategy allowed a gentle introduction of the new brand with a concurrent phasing out of the older brand. This was generally the case with Concord University, Fairmont State University, Shepherd University, and West Virginia State University.

Merged institutions that fused the original brand to the new brand utilized a “Combined Branding” strategy. Salem-Teikyo University and West Virginia University Institute of Technology both used this strategy. Two schools, The University of Charleston and Mountain State University, employed the “Translucent Warning” strategy where intense promotion preceded a phase in of the new brand. With “Sudden Eradication,” Wheeling Jesuit University and Ohio Valley University dropped the old brands in favor of the new brands overnight. Two strategies identified by Kaikati and

Kaikati, “Counter-Takeover” and “Retrobranding” were not employed by West Virginia schools.

Two areas that were generally not changed in the rebranding processes included schools’ colors and mascot. Alumni generally regarded both as sacred territory. While Armstrong Atlantic had changed mascot names to the “Stingrays,” they eventually returned to the original mascot name of the “Pirates.” Only one school broached this area successfully: Georgia College & State University. While the institution’s new name was initially problematic for stakeholders, allowing students to choose the new mascot and school colors was deemed a success.

In financing the name change, most schools indicated that the monetary commitment was minimal at most. Where state institutions rebranded (as with West Virginia and Georgia), no additional funding was provided. Most schools admitted to allowing existing stationery to become exhausted before ordering new, some schools did not immediately change signage.

While not tied specifically to the name change, federal appropriations boosted the reputation of several schools. The additional funding often aided in building institutional credibility that ultimately resulted in a change in status. Such was the case with funding provided through Senator Robert C. Byrd to several West Virginia schools. The appropriations helped to provide the necessary infrastructure to become universities. Wheeling Jesuit University is the best example of this. Likewise, The University of Charleston had the opportunity to grow into the university it desperately tried to become in 1979 with its pharmacy school – funded in part by Senator Byrd.

***Question 5: What influence did regulatory bodies have upon the change?***

According to information gathered during the interview process and through historical research, regulatory bodies (outside of state bodies) had little effect upon an institution's decision to implement a "college-to-university" change. While accrediting bodies and other degree-approving bodies could delay the implementation of graduate programs, these bodies generally did not influence rebranding efforts.

For state institutions, governmental agencies exerted great influence upon the name change. In Georgia, the Chancellor and the Board of Regents imposed name changes upon a number of institutions in 1996 (including 13 new universities). This produced mixed results. At schools where stakeholders responded negatively, the reactions were highly emotional. In West Virginia, the legislature had reservations with allowing Concord, Fairmont State, Shepherd, and West Virginia State to be elevated to university status. While the process was difficult, it required only one legislative session for passage. The legislative process in other states often lasted over a decade.

***Question 6: What were reactions of stakeholders to the change?***

When institutional rebranding occurs, its success is often judged by the reaction of key stakeholder groups. Historical research, survey results, and interviews with administrators noted the level of involvement by key stakeholder groups. In several instances, for example, stakeholders have prevented an intended rebrand from being implemented. For this study, several groups were identified. These included students, institutional governing boards, administration, the community at large, faculty, alumni, former employees, and other institutions. Some wielded more influence than others.

***Student support.*** While a question regarding students' reaction to the name change was omitted from the institutional survey instrument, historical research and interviews with administrators provided information regarding student reactions. At several schools in Georgia and at Virginia's University of Mary Washington, students visibly opposed the name change by staging protests. In West Virginia, students initially had difficulty in accepting the Morris Harvey College change to The University of Charleston. These negative feelings, however, subsided after several months. At Ohio Valley University, the students accepted the change immediately. At most other West Virginia schools, there did not appear to any polarized action toward the rebranding. Of the stakeholder groups, students did not appear to exert much influence unless accompanied by other stakeholder groups with similar reactions.

***Board support.*** According to the survey results, the area that garnered the most perceived support was the institutional governing board. With a four-point Likert scale (4 = "strongly agree"; 3 = "agree"; 2 = "disagree"; 1 = "strongly disagree"), responses regarding board support were overwhelmingly positive. The mean score for board acceptance of the change was 3.94 concerning the statement, "[t]he institutional board supported the change."

Administrators' responses to this statement were as follows: 93.75% strongly agreed and 6.25% agreed. No negative perceptions of the board's support of the change were noted. During the qualitative data collection process (both interviews and historical), it appeared that slight issues regarding board support occurred at two West Virginia schools. At The University of Charleston, a former president serving as an emeritus trustee (and having a considerable amount of influence) could have become a

major opponent of the name change measure; however, other board members intervened. Likewise, some board opposition existed at Wheeling Jesuit University until the president and other board members provided solid arguments for proceeding with the change. This helped convince dissenters among the trustees to accept the proposed change.

***Administration support.*** For the most part, the institution’s administration supported the change from a college to a university. From the survey results, the mean score on a 4.00 scale was 3.74. In response to the statement “[a]dministration supported the change,” 28 administrators (82.35%) strongly agreed, four (11.76%) agreed, one (2.94%) disagreed, and one (2.94%) strongly disagreed. At some of the institutions in West Virginia, staffing alterations at the administrative level were necessary to accomplish the name change initiative; however, the majority of presidents had full support of their administrative staffs for the rebranding agenda.

***Community support.*** Regarding the statement, “[t]he community supported the change,” 33 administrators responded in the following manner: 17 (51.51%) strongly agreed, 13 (39.39%) agreed, two (6.06%) disagreed, and one (3.03%) strongly disagreed. Two of the schools that had problems with the community at large had well-publicized conflicts with a number of stakeholder groups regarding the change. The mean score for community support was 3.39 on a 4.00 scale. Additionally, eight survey respondents listed “community sarcasm” as one of the top five interesting aspects of the name change.

West Virginia institutions received little difficulty with community support with the exception of West Virginia University Institute of Technology; most of this occurred much later when plans to move the engineering department to South Charleston were being discussed. At Salem-Teikyo, there were some issues with the community accepting

the influx of Japanese students, but this passed in time. In one instance, the community was the primary supporting group when Morris Harvey College transitioned to The University of Charleston.

**Faculty support.** Regarding the statement “[f]aculty supported the change,” 33 administrators responded in the following manner: 13 (39.39%) strongly agreed, 13 (39.39%) agreed, six (18.18%) disagreed, and one (3.03%) strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.15 on a 4.00 point scale. In West Virginia, faculty at most institutions supported the change and, in most cases, was engaged in the process. Some faculty resistance occurred at two schools. At The University of Charleston, faculty members were disgruntled; however, they were not very vocal in their opposition for fear of losing their positions at the school. At Ohio Valley University, several did not support the change because it required some faculty members to upgrade their credentials. These individuals either left the institution or eventually realized on their own that the change was a positive move for the institution.

**Alumni support.** Regarding the statement “[a]lumni supported the change,” 33 administrators responded in the following manner: 11 (33.33%) strongly agreed, 13 (39.39%) agreed, 5 (15.15%) disagreed, 4 (12.12%) strongly disagreed. The mean score was 2.94 out of 4.00. This was only area where the mean score fell below 3.00, an equivalent score for agreeing with the statement. It also was the only area where the “strongly agree” responses were fewer than those who agreed with the statement. While the scores trended positive, there were definite issues with alumni acceptance at several institutions. Again, West Virginia schools largely had no problems in this area. Historical and interview data revealed that the only significant alumni reaction was at

The University of Charleston, where alumni vehemently opposed the tampering with the Morris Harvey brand.

***Former employee reaction.*** Only one school experienced difficulties with former employees. Although not mentioned in the interview process, current media reports and historical research provided documentation of a situation at WVU Tech. When Governor Joe Manchin announced his plans for WVU Tech, seven women (including five former employees) formed Take Back Tech and mounted a campaign against the proposal. Throughout Fayette County, WV, these women canvassed the community gathering over 7,000 signatures in support of the Tech they once knew. The tenacity of these women aided in altering the proposed direction for Tech; however, their wishes to stop the forthcoming WVU divisional status (including filing a lawsuit) were unsuccessful. It is highly unlikely than many institutions will experience this type of reaction from former employees who are not part of another stakeholder group.

***The reaction of other institutions.*** In West Virginia, the reaction of other institutions to a proposed change was experienced four times. When WVU and WV Tech were planning to merge, Marshall University (MU) President Wade Gilley cried foul. Some believe that his initial opposition resulted in MU's being permitted to absorb the West Virginia Graduate College during the following year. The move by John Carrier, president of WVU Tech, caused the presidents within the West Virginia State College System to distance themselves from him, lest they be perceived as considering similar moves at their own institutions.

Only one instance resulted in a lawsuit. When The College of West Virginia began to plan a change to Mountain State University (MSU), Mountain State College

(MSC) in Parkersburg protested. MSU filed suit to challenge MSC's claim to a name they considered an exclusive mark. After two years, MSU worked out a settlement with MSC and gained rights without opposition to continue to use the brand (Mountain State University v. Mountain State College, 2002). The only other issue regarding the reaction of other institutions was the lack of synergy and cooperation among the four schools that became universities in 2004. Had these schools worked together rather than independently, they may have had fewer difficulties with the legislature.

***Correlations.*** Three sets of data regarding stakeholder support showed statistically significant correlations. When faculty supported the change, there was a corresponding correlation with alumni support. A correlation also existed between alumni and community support, and between the support of the administration and the faculty. No other correlations were found. The support of certain key stakeholders appears to have a corresponding effect upon other key stakeholder groups.

***Question 7: How did senior administrators perceive the success of the change?***

***General observations.*** Respondents to the survey indicated five primary areas that they judged as the basis for the success of the name change. In a ranking question, participants were asked to rank predetermined factors and, if necessary, add any additional factors to the list. A total of 14 categories were reported and those that had similar themes were combined. Points were calculated by assigning five points to the number one reason, four points to the number two reason, and so forth. The clarification of identity ranked number one with a total point value of 139. Other significant reasons included the following: enhanced reputation (90 points), enrollment and recruiting (72

points), new programs (35 points), and international issues (recruiting, attractiveness, etc.; 32 points). All other responses totaled to 17 points.

***Enrollment.*** In regard to enrollment, most schools indicated some growth after rebranding. When rating the statement “[e]nrollments increased as a result of the name change,” 29.41% strongly agreed, 41.18% agreed, 14.71% disagreed, and 14.71% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 2.85 on a four-point scale. It should be noted that while schools indicated enrollment was one of the reasons the change was viewed as successful, it was not one of the top two criteria to evaluate the institution’s success in the endeavor. In addition, enrollment was not cited as the major rationale for the change, as it ranked fourth.

By using Paul S. Koku’s (1997) model of analyzing the effectiveness of college and university strategic name changes, the mean incremental change in enrollment prior to the name change was compared to the mean incremental change in enrollment after the name change. The mean incremental change was determined by taking the enrollment of one year (Year A) minus the enrollment of the previous year (Year B) and dividing the difference by the enrollment of the previous year (Year B) – thus creating a percentage of growth or loss from the previous year. The mean incremental change was computed for the five years prior to the change and for five years after the change. This was a mathematical average of the percentages of growth or loss in enrollment from these years.

Koku looked at what he considered strategic name changes and found no significance in enrollment after the change. In looking at 103 “college-to-university” rebranded schools from 1996 to 2001, the results were different and a significance was

noted in the level of enrollment growth. The growth, which on average was still occurring, did so at a much slower pace. Thus, an analysis of the data indicated that perhaps the “college-to-university” change had an overall negative effect on the percentage of enrollment growth at these institutions. This is not to say that enrollment growth did not occur, as it did. What it does indicate is that, at most institutions, the growth rate was slower than it was prior to the change. This was unlike Koku’s results, which indicated that enrollment growth remained at a constant level. Several independent variables were also analyzed. These included the following: institutional size, institutional type, and the type of change.

Concerning institutional size, only one category showed a significant change in enrollment after the rebranding. Institutional size was based upon the school’s enrollment during the change year. Medium sized schools (2,000 to 4,999 FTE) experienced the only statistically significant post-change enrollment trends. The rate of incremental enrollment for medium-sized institutions was in the negative figures, meaning the greatest loss in percentage of incremental enrollment growth occurred at medium-sized schools. With exception to having only two proprietary schools (5.41%) in this category, the medium-sized schools were heterogeneous with regard to institutional control, as 27.03% were private/independent, 32.43% were public, and 35.14% were religious. One state, Georgia, dominated this category of schools; seven of the eight were public institutions that experienced unique recruiting and retention problems during the years following the name changes. This issue will be discussed in further detail. This researcher found no apparent reason why medium-sized schools experienced the worst growth rates after a university rebranding.

Next, the independent variable of institutional type was analyzed. Schools were grouped by their control identities as found in the *HEP Higher Education Directories*. As some schools changed control (including one private becoming a public institution), control was based upon data from the change year. Since the *HEP Higher Education Directories* listed religious-controlled schools by their denomination or controlling body, these were all grouped under a generic “religious” category. The other categories included public, private, and proprietary. No significant post-change incremental enrollment could be attributed to the independent variable of institutional type.

In an analysis of the independent variable of the type of name change, three categories were constructed: minor-simple, minor-complex, and major. With minor-simple, “college” was replaced with “university” (i.e., Athens State College to Athens State University). Minor-complex name changes retained the school’s primary identifier, but made other changes to the name along with adding the word “university” (i.e., Armstrong State College to Armstrong Atlantic State University). Major changes indicated a complete institutional rebranding with the new name having no similarities to the former brand (i.e., The Graduate School of America to Capella University). Only one category, the minor-simple name change, indicated significance. Again, the rate of growth had slowed significantly post-change and there is no apparent reason why this occurred. Other variables that were not analyzed (i.e., funding, the availability of student aid, the economy, changes in demographics, etc.) could have contributed to the slower rate of growth rather than, or in combination with, the change in name.

In at least two states, other variables affected enrollment at institutions that had rebranded. In Georgia, a change from the quarter system to the semester system appears

to have affected enrollment at 11 of the 13 new universities. Likewise in West Virginia, the separation of the community and technical colleges from their parent institutions affected enrollment. While most institutions in West Virginia did not have an appreciable gain or loss following the adoption of the university name, the schools that made the change based upon survival reasons had the most difficulty in attracting and retaining students. Additionally, it is too early to judge the overall enrollment effect of the change at five of the West Virginia institutions in this study, as these name changes were only implemented in 2004 and 2005.

***Question 8: Did the change produce any indicators of increased prestige?***

***Carnegie Classification.*** In an analysis of 103 colleges that became universities from 1996 to 2001, there was a significant change in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education five years after an institution rebranded as a university. In addition, the independent variables of institutional size and type of name change also indicated statistical significances in Carnegie Classifications five years following the change. In a further examination of these variables, some insight can be garnered. An analysis of small institutions (0 – 1,999 FTE) indicated a statistical significance at the .01 level for post-change Carnegie Classifications, medium sized schools (2,000 – 4,999 FTE) indicated a statistical significance at the .05 level. Large schools showed no significance. It appears therefore, that larger schools have a diminished probability of change in Carnegie Classifications than do small and medium-sized schools.

***An increase in graduate programs.*** For the population of 103 schools that rebranded as universities from 1996 to 2001, a graduate program score was achieved by counting graduate and professional programs during the year of the institutional change.

These programs were then classified according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. The number of programs were then multiplied by their NCES ranking number. The procedure was used for the graduate program score for the year of the name change and the fifth year after the change. The independent variables of institutional type and accrediting body produced a statistical significance, with the greatest significance attributable to the regional accrediting body variable.

The six regional accrediting bodies accredit institutions and not programs; however, programs at a level not specified in an institutions' statement of affiliation status must receive prior approval (Higher Learning Commission, 2003). The regional accrediting body variable was further analyzed and institutions under the jurisdiction of three regional accrediting bodies indicated significance. Institutions accredited through the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools produced significance at the .05 level. Schools under the jurisdiction of both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association produced significance at the .01 level. Because only one school under the jurisdiction of The New England Association of Schools and Colleges was included in the population, an analysis of schools within this region could not be accomplished. In relation to the two remaining regional bodies, the reason that the two most western accrediting bodies (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and Western Association of Colleges and Schools) did not indicate a statistical significance in the area of graduate programmatic growth is not currently known. There is strong indication that the move from a college to university generally is accompanied by an increased graduate programmatic focus.

***Undergraduate selectivity.*** An institution's selectivity has been used as a criterion of institutional prestige. Since data were not available from the entire population of 103 institutions, a sample of 71 schools was analyzed using the SPSS statistical software program. The 1998 through 2008 issues of *U.S. News and World Reports America's Best Colleges* were used to gather the selectivity data of the 71 institutions comparing both the year of the change and the fifth year after the change. There was no statistical significance in regard to undergraduate selectivity within the entire sample. No statistical significance was noted upon comparing the figures by the independent variables of institutional size, institutional type, type of change, and accrediting body.

***Tuition increases.*** To test the "Chivas Regal Effect" (Sevier, 2002a; Werth, 1988) of an institution's pricing structure as an indication of prestige, incremental changes in tuition were compared prior to and following the name change. In a comparison of incremental tuition increases, no significance was indicated five years after the change. As independent variables were analyzed, no significance was noted with institutional size, institutional type, type of change, or jurisdiction under a specific regional accrediting body.

***Perception of prestige.*** When administrators were asked to respond to the statement: "The institution is perceived as having a greater prestige," 13 (38.24%) strongly agreed, 16 (47.06%) agreed, four (11.76%) disagreed, and one (2.94%) strongly disagreed. This area had a mean score of 3.21 on a 4.00-point scale. Therefore, administrators generally perceived that their institutions increased in prestige with the university designation.

***Perception of university culture.*** Birnbaum (1993) and Hearn (2005) equated “university culture” as a community of scholars generating and promoting new ideas. The attainment of the culture of a university was identified as an indicator of institutional prestige. In relation to this, administrators rated the following statement: “The institution currently exhibits the culture of a university.” The following results were noted: 9 (26.47%) strongly agreed, 19 (55.88%) agreed, 9 (26.47%) disagreed, and no respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score for this variable was 2.91 on a 4.00 point scale. While generally positive, there is an indication that certain institutions were perceived as still lacking university culture by their administration.

***Correlations.*** When comparing the nine statements on a 4.00-point Likert scale from the survey responses, several areas produced significant positive correlations. There was a correlation between increase in enrollment and the perception of prestige. Perceptions of institutional prestige and the attainment of university culture also indicated a correlation. In addition, the perception of university culture correlated with two areas of stakeholder support: alumni and community.

The correlation between a rise enrollment and the prestige of an institution may represent administrators’ opinions that an enrollment increase signified prestige, or it may indicate that with an increase in prestige, enrollments may have correspondingly increased. The correlation between institutional prestige and university culture may signify that as an institution is viewed as prestigious, there may be a corresponding opinion that “university culture” is being exhibited. Therefore, when the university mission is viewed successfully, there may be a corresponding attitude that the institution has prestige. Concerning the correlation between university culture and the support of

alumni and the local community, two possibilities may exist. First, the perception of university culture may correspond to greater alumni and community support, and second, as these stakeholders supported the change, there was a greater perception that institution had exhibited the culture of a university.

***Question 9: What suggestions did administrators provide upon revisiting the change?***

Regarding institutional advice, the 34 survey institutions provided a number of key recommendations. With the responses collapsed into workable categories, the number one suggestion was to “have a good reason to change” at 147 points. A close second at 141 points was to “have a defensible name that relates to the institutional mission.” The remaining advice included “address stakeholder issues” (81 points), “have a marketing plan” (50 points), “calculate actual costs” (28 points), and “divest of the old name” (8 points).

From most West Virginia administrators, there were few suggestions regarding the rebranding experience. For those institutions that reflected upon the “college-to-university” change, three broad areas emerged. These were preparation, continuation, and integration. The advice in the preparatory phase included involving key stakeholders in the decision process and performing the necessary research in advance of the change. Often these two suggestions were interrelated, as research may dictate how stakeholders will react to a proposed change.

Concerning continuation, several bits of advice emerged. First, allocate enough resources to properly promote the new brand. Second, make sure the mission is focused. It is one thing to *call* a school a university; however, it something entirely different to *be*

a university. Last, plan the name change at a time for the maximum results. As several administrators suggested that the name change may be more successful if it is scheduled when key stakeholders can be involved.

The advice on integration centered largely on mergers. From the experience with West Virginia University and West Virginia Institute of Technology, it may have been best to have integrated from the very beginning rather than have endured the slow and painful process that both schools experienced. While swift integration may be extremely painful initially, this should subside after a couple of years. One administrator suggested assessing the situation immediately and then periodically. Another administrator suggested giving the merged body a little more control over certain areas so that employees may perceive that they have some effect upon their own destiny.

***Question 10: What methods can institutions use to retain ownership of a brand?***

While no significant branding struggles have occurred in West Virginia, another school in the Appalachian region has had its brand tested four times in 40 years. Allegheny College, located in Meadville, PA, is a prime of example of institutional brand presence and perseverance. This medium-sized liberal arts college has battled much larger entities and won. Even in the face of schools that had a seemingly legitimate claim on the same geographic brand, Allegheny College retained its brand dominance.

This dominance can be attributed to a number of factors including the following:

- a) the longevity of the brand's usage;
- b) a good academic reputation;
- c) a succinct mission;
- d) an identification of fallacious arguments from branding challengers; and
- e) a willingness to protect its institutional identity at all costs. This protection included one

lawsuit in which Allegheny College, the underdog, was the victor. Allegheny College has been so successful that it forced two institutions to limit how they used their brand name choices and forced two other institutions to alter their brand names.

With the Community College of Allegheny County, Allegheny College was successful in limiting how the school identifies itself. The school refers to itself only by its full name or by the initials CCAC. When Allegany Community College in Cumberland, Maryland changed its name to Allegany College, Allegheny College forced the institution to rebrand a second time as Allegany College of Maryland.

When Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh expanded its mission to health care education, Allegheny College cried foul at the marketing efforts of Allegheny University of Health Sciences (AUHS) when it identified itself solely as “Allegheny University.” The parent organization, the Allegheny Health, Education, and Research Foundation, was Pennsylvania’s largest health care provider. In the legal judgment, AUHS was forced to only use its full name or the AUHS initials in marketing. It was also required to surrender the allegheny.edu domain name and to change its institutional logo.

In 2006, Penn State McKeesport announced that it would be taking a new name, “Penn State Allegheny,” and Allegheny College took on the 10<sup>th</sup> largest university system in the United States. After numerous phone calls, letters, and meetings, Allegheny College persuaded Penn State to rename the institution. Although a compromise with the Penn State Greater Allegheny name occurred, Allegheny College effectively changed the direction of these rebranding efforts.

Chapter 9 details these successes as well as some of the issues at each institution with the reasons to rebrand. All four schools were either larger or belonged to a larger organization, three of these were located in Allegheny County, PA and one in Allegany County, MD. While under current Pennsylvania trademark law, geographical names could not be considered as exclusive property; however, Allegheny College prevailed and its ownership of the brand they have held since 1815 has been validated (Alaya, 1996). An Internet search of the brand confirms that Allegheny College dominates the Allegheny brand in all uses including education.

### **Conclusions**

In analyzing the findings of this study, some results support the findings of previous research while others do not. The major reasons for the rebrandings were “to reflect the institutions’ current status,” “to define the future mission of the institution,” “to increase prestige,” “to increase enrollment,” and other factors relating to international marketing. These responses were dissimilar from Spencer’s (2005) study on complete name changes. Spencer reported that the top reasons for name changes included a state-ordered mandate, internal restructuring, marketability, a relationship to mission, and an existence of an inappropriate name. He did mention that the state mandated change in Georgia skewed his results for this one question. Seven of the schools in his study were part of this mandated change, although only five rebranded as universities. Two institutions (Georgia Perimeter College and Coastal Georgia Community College) were two-year schools that simultaneously changed names under the same mandate.

Of the nine rebranded universities in this study, all acknowledged the mandate by Chancellor Portch; five, however, gave the primary reason as “to reflect the institution’s

current status.” Three of the institutions failed to answer this question (two stated “does not apply” and one left the answer blank) and one selected “enhanced reputation.” The purpose of the Georgia mandate was to align a school’s name with its current mission of graduate education at the master’s level.

Of the 34 survey respondents, 19 administrators listed “to reflect the institution’s current status” as the number one rationale for the change. An additional eight institutions indicated that this reason was a contributing factor. This is consistent with the experiences by the majority West Virginia’s rebranded universities. Matching the current institutional status to its name was related to the primary reason given by West Virginia administrators as justification for the university designation. Institutions generally equated graduate education to university status, although, no previous studies were found regarding a definition of university status. Likewise, the strategies employed for the change were not collected in any other single study; however, the organizational changes and name selection processes can be compared to the single institutional studies conducted by Garvey (2007), Hauck (1998), Perry (2003), Rosenthal (2003), Taccone (1999), and Tisdell (2003). While this study averaged the amount of time for a “college-to-university” name change at 22 months, Spencer (2005) reported a mean of 15 months for complete name changes. It was also determined that the stated time was far less than the actual time spent in preparation of a change (Garvey, 2007; Hauck, 1998; Perry, 2003; Rosenthal, 2003, & Tisdell, 2003).

Regulatory bodies at the state level were very pervasive in the change process for public institutions. Hartford (1976) and Tisdell (2003) both chronicled the influence of legislative bodies in the name change process. In some states such as Pennsylvania and

New Jersey, state systems extended influence over private, religious, and proprietary institutions as well, as noted by Perry (2003). Spencer (2005) documented the University System of Georgia's mandate to rebrand many of the state's institutions in 1996.

When asked to rate the top five "most interesting aspects of the name change," administrators indicated that stakeholder support played a key role in the acceptance or the rejection of the name change initiative. The responses were rated by assigning points to the administrator's responses. The most interesting aspect was given five points, the second most interesting aspect was assigned four points, and so on. Alumni reaction was the number one response (with a total of 94 points). This suggests that, at least with the schools that responded, the name produced a strong response from alumni. While it is possible that this could have been a positive response, and it was probably the case at one institution, historical data concerning the changes at the majority of these schools indicated that the response was strongly negative.

When all stakeholder related responses ("community sarcasm," "political interference," "faculty resistance," "resistance by current students," "community favor," and "faculty/staff reactions") were combined, the top score increased to a point value of 167. This is consistent with Spencer's (2005) findings as stakeholder reactions (primarily alumni) were noted to have created problems during the process.

Negative alumni reactions indicated in the ranking question concerning "the most interesting aspects of the name change" corresponded to lower scores on the Likert scale responses to "[a]lumni supported the name change." In regard to all of stakeholder support, alumni ranked the lowest at a mean score of 2.94 out of 4.00. Board support ranked the highest at 3.94 with administrative support at 3.74. The importance of

securing the support of the board and administration is consistent with Garvey's (2007) analysis of Philadelphia University. The major stakeholder problems in West Virginia appear to have occurred at The University of Charleston (alumni) and WVU Tech (former employees).

In regard to the success of the change, "clarification of identity," "enhanced reputation," and "enrollment and recruiting" were identified as the top indicators of success of the name change. This did not entirely follow Spencer's (2005) results. Spencer reported that the majority of his participants had no measure for the success of the change. Those that did respond identified "increased enrollment," "better reputation," and "better students" as the top three indicators of success.

Additionally, while Spencer (2005) indicated increased enrollment as the primary success indicator, Koku (1997) concluded that a strategic name change had no significant effect on enrollment. This analysis of 103 "college-to-university" changed institutions differed from both studies in that there was a significant effect upon enrollment; however, this effect was negative. Although institutions continued to attract students, they were not attracting and retaining students at the same level as prior to the change. This suggests that the name change may have produced slower growth than before. The reason for this is not known; however, other variables may have contributed to this slowed growth as did the quarter to semester system change in Georgia.

Certain measurable results regarding institutional prestige, such as an elevation in Carnegie Classification status and increased numbers of graduate certificates and degrees, are consistent with Morpew's (2000) findings. Morpew concluded that with a "college-to-university" change, there was a corresponding increase in the emphasis on

graduate education. No significant changes in tuition and institutional selectivity occurred. While institutions had a greater graduate focus and hence an increase in Carnegie rank, these indicators of prestige did not accompany significantly higher tuition or greater admissions selectivity.

In regard to Morphew's (2000) secondary data, the institutional profile has some elements that are similar and some that are not. Any differences may be attributed to the different institutional populations utilized in the two studies. Morphew's (2000) generalization, that institutions at the baccalaureate Carnegie Classification were more likely to seek a change to university status than master's level institutions, was not corroborated in this study. While a significant number of baccalaureate class schools (30.10%) sought the university designation, the largest number (40.78%) were already at the master's level.

Morphew (2000) also discovered that less selective institutions were more likely pursue the "college-to-university" change. In the analysis of the population of 103 institutions, institutional selectivity data was only available for 71 of the schools. Taken from *U.S. News and World Reports America's Best Colleges 1998 - 2008*, selectivity data was tracked for the year of the name change and for five years after. Selectivity information was two years behind the publication's date, therefore, the 1998 edition reported 1996 data; the 2006 edition reported 2004 figures. For the 71 institutions, the selectivity was reported for the year of the change was as follows: least selective (5.63%), less selective (19.72%), selective (66.20%), more selective (8.45%), and most selective (0.00%). While the lower selective institutions outnumber the more selective institutions, the greatest number fell within the middle of the continuum. These figures

that trended to lower selectivity are similar to Morphew's findings; however, Morphew did not identify any institutions equivalent to the more selective category.

Likewise, Morphew's (2000) findings on institutional size were replicated. In this analysis of the 103 institutions, 48% of the schools were small institutions (0 – 1,999 FTE). This supported Morphew's assumption that smaller schools are more likely to seek a "college-to-university" change than larger schools. Additionally, Morphew characterized the majority of the institutions as being private. Spencer's (2005) sample consisted primarily of public institutions. Since this study discriminated among the various subcategories of private institutions, denominationally controlled institutions comprised the largest group experiencing the "college-to-university" change. Of the 103 schools, 45.63% were reported as religiously controlled schools. In addition, 10 faith-based schools chose to self-report as private, independent colleges. These schools were not listed as being controlled by a denomination or other religious body.

While Morphew (2000) declined to identify the motivational factors that led small, less selective, and resource-poor institutions to become universities, the possibility of an increase in prestige seems likely based on his findings. An increase in prestige would position the institution for greater appropriations and greater success in attracting students. In this study, the majority of administrators judged that their institutions had attained a level of prestige (85.29%) and exhibited the culture of a university (82.35%) resulting from the name change.

The advice provided by administrators was consistent with responses gathered by Spencer (2005). Both studies produced as the number one suggestion "hav[ing] a good reason to change." While Spencer's second and third rated responses dealt with

stakeholders (“have input from all stakeholders” at second, and “address alumni issues first” at third), this study produced second and third ranked reactions that were a combination of similar responses. The second ranked suggestion was “have a defensible name that related to the institutional mission” and the third dealt with the addressing of stakeholder concerns (“address alumni issues first” comprised the largest representation of the combined stakeholder category). While most West Virginia administrators hesitated to advise others, those who offered advice suggested having adequate preparation, a commitment to the institutional mission, and an assessment of the actions once the change occurred.

Finally, the case study on the Allegheny educational brand provided a number of illustrations helpful in both the areas of brand selection and brand protection. In the area of brand selection, background research may prevent later difficulties. Even if a similar brand is selected, a conciliatory arrangement between institutions, as was reached between Allegheny College and the Community College of Allegheny County, can allow these institutions to coexist under mutually agreeable arrangements. A similar arrangement was offered to Allegheny University of Health Sciences, but this was largely ignored by AUHS.

When changing an institutional name, there will be times when the selected name will be challenged by other institutions (Perry, 2003; Rosenthal, 2003; Tisdell, 2003). As suggested by survey participants, “having a defensible name” and supplying concrete arguments for the change and the new name will make the transition smoother. Penn State McKeesport’s arguments for changing its name to Penn State Allegheny and then ultimately to Penn State Greater Allegheny were viewed as weak. The community,

which fought the name change and lost, judged all of the publicized arguments as being specious. The real reason for the change, which was apparent to most stakeholders, was often denied by senior administration as the motivation. Stronger arguments and improved stakeholder involvement may have made this name change a less adversarial issue.

As to brand protection, Allegheny College provided several examples of undying tenacity to retain its own brand name. Even when a challenger's claim to the brand may have appeared to be logical, Allegheny College prevailed. The willingness to hold its ground on more than one occasion has served only to strengthen Allegheny College's continued ownership of its brand identity.

### **Implications**

This study addressed several issues relating to institutional name changes and specifically the rebranding of a college as a university. While this in-depth analysis looked at many factors contributing to the success, or lack thereof, of institutions involved in the process, a generalization of the issues is difficult. The implications of this study provided administrators' rationale, suggestions, and models in regard to what Tadelis (1997) considered as a business' most valuable asset – its name. It also raises some potential pitfalls.

- By studying the events at other institutions, college administrators can acquire some insight on whether to attempt become a university. If choosing this course of action, they will have examples of strategies to consider when making such a change.

- Administrators can use the material from this study to anticipate stakeholder reactions and make informed decisions on which key stakeholder groups need to be part of the change process.
- Administrators considering a merger with another institution can study the events at Salem-Teikyo University (now Salem International University), West Virginia University Institute of Technology, and the former West Virginia Graduate College (now Marshall University Graduate College) to develop a frame of reference of possible implications of an institutional merger.
- The case study of the Allegheny brand can provide examples of how one institution protected its own brand in the event of trademark infringement. It may also serve as a source of inspiration to other colleges facing similar issues.
- Of the 22 major interviews conducted in this study, six of the participants at the time of their interviews had retired from the full-time business of education. Since participating, two have additionally retired, one has moved to a diminished role at his institution, and two others have announced a planned retirement. As administrators continue to reach retirement age, they too will transition to the next phases of their lives. As these administrators move away from the academy, their insight into the critical events surrounding their institution's rebranding will not be as easily accessible and hence important institutional history may not be documented. Therefore, this study may serve to provide the only documentation of these administrators' recollections and opinions of their rebranding experiences.

- In a similar vein, certain information contained within this study supplies a historical context of events that are either undocumented elsewhere or not synthesized into a single manuscript. This may enable individuals conducting historical research of a particular institution some additional primary and secondary resource material.

### **Recommendations**

In light of this study, there are several recommendations the researcher has made for future study regarding the “college-to-university” change and institutional rebranding in general.

- While this study looked at secondary data and changes in variables five years following a name change, a reanalysis of the data from the 103 institutions that rebranded as universities from 1996 to 2001 would provide a longitudinal element to the subject. This could be done ten years following the name change to see if any significant changes occurred after this period in the following areas: enrollment, Carnegie Classifications, numbers and types of graduate programs, tuition, and institutional selectivity.
- Although this study was largely centered from an administrator’s perspective, a qualitative or mixed method study looking at the West Virginia’s rebranded universities from the perspectives of alumni, faculty, administration, or institutional board members would provide insight into how specific stakeholder groups viewed the changes.

- A researcher could replicate Hartman's (1976) study on legislative rationale regarding the "college-to-university" change. By analyzing West Virginia's SB 448 (2004) in light of legislative support or rejection, a researcher could determine what part(s) of the bill (university status, community college, or other educational measure) and/or any outside force influenced its passage.
- Because this study only provided the perspective of one legislator, a qualitative study involving several current and past legislators would fill this void.
- An in-depth study of the proposed name change by West Liberty State College as it is occurring could provide a complete analysis of the name change process as it evolves for a thorough case study.
- As this study concentrated on West Virginia, an analysis of the rebrandings in another state could provide a broader perspective on this phenomenon.
- Since this study did not analyze marketing and promotional materials in relation to the name change, a study on the influence of these materials on perceptions of the success of the "college-to-university" transition is warranted.
- Since three primary "college-to-university" name strategies were noted, a study of the alumni perceptions based upon the type of change may prove interesting.
- Finally, much like the studies of Garvey (2007), Perkins (2007), and Rosenthal (2003), an analysis of the leadership style of the president (or chancellor in regard to Georgia) who led the rebranding charge at his or her institution would provide insight regarding how much that individual's style and personality led to the success or failure of a particular change. As with Garvey, Perkins, and Rosenthal,

a broad range of past and present interview subjects produced information rich documents that chronicled a single dynamic individual responsible for institutional change.

### **The Final Word**

Much of the success or failure of a “college-to-university” change lies within the realm of the primary change agent. At the majority of institutions in this study, the university president or CEO was the responsible party. Outside of Georgia (where Chancellor Stephen Portch led the charge) and a few isolated examples where the board acted as the change agent, the president drove the initiative. In her study of college presidents, Perkins noted that institutions as a whole desired “a leader who had vision, who could take the institution to the next level of success, and who could make the big decisions” (2007, p. 156). Among the characteristics of a successful change agent, as Garvey (2007) explained was “a spirit of entrepreneurialism – a drive to both understand the market and to shape the institution in a way that it could respond quickly to new opportunities” (p. 103).

Finally, Polk and White (2007) emphasized timing and intuition in executing change. The “ability to make practical and pragmatic decisions rules the executive leadership scene . . . Such [intuitive] abilities, or ‘gut level’ reactions, can figure significantly in effective decision making” (pp. 37-38). In the context of rebranding, a leader who can envision the future, rally the troops, initiate important decisions, be able to adapt to the marketplace, and have the necessary intuition on when to act should have no problem taking a college to that next level – its new identity as a university.