OFFICIAL NARRATIVES OF STATUS AND STRATEGY IN WORLD CLASS INSTITUTIONS: BEYOND ISOMORPHISM

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Abstract

Leaders of world-class research universities present a public discourse about status that is captured in annual addresses, letters to the community, reports, strategic plans, and other official presentations. This project attempts to identify the narratives of status as represented in the official discourse of university presidents, vice-chancellors, and chancellors. It relies on Slaughter’s (1993) approach to identifying narratives in official speech of institutional leaders, and on Salmi’s (2009) categorization of the common features of world-class institutions. Challenging the concept that institutional isomorphism should lead to homogeny in institutional narratives, this study reveals that great differentiation in the field of research-intensive, world-class higher education institutions leads to distinct approaches to the narrative of status. The analyses confirm Reisman (1958) and reintroduces the concept that institutional activity is not as tightly isomorphic as would be expected based on more current dominant notions of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This project proposes that analysis of higher education, indeed any analysis based on institutional theory, needs to recognize that behavior is not intentionally linked from one sector of a field to the next, with the model institutions laying the path and the rest of the field summarily following along. Instead, the following institutions may chart their own course based on incomplete information and an inability to detect the direction and activities, the motivation and results, taking place at the head of the field. Expanding on Reisman (1958), I propose a *distinct field* revision to traditional institutional theory, which allows for variations and freedom from homogeny within the greater field of higher education, as an explanation for variation in institutional behavior.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this age of globalization, international competition in higher education is increasing. One component of international competition is how universities measure themselves against each other. Universities are measured by a number of metrics, including research expenditures and publications, scores of incoming students, placement of graduates, athletic success, and selectivity and yield rates, to mention only a few. Due to the complex nature of universities, many metrics attempt to combine these and other factors into formal ranking systems, such as those by Shanghai Jiao-Tong University, Times Higher Education, and U.S. News and World Report. Such systems identify, establish, and reinforce university prestige, providing comparative ratings of status that can foster and mark status-seeking behaviors within and among institutions.

Institutional prestige, however it is determined, plays a large role in the perceived quality of a university. Competition to be recognized as a world-class institution is a goal that is accepted and expected by many within and outside universities worldwide. University managers play a significant part in marketing the institution, in (re)formulating the institution’s identity and mission, in articulating and acting on its status aspirations, in affecting institutional culture, and in the promotion of new ventures as well as various status-seeking activities. When promoting the institution, a common theme in recent years is to talk about the status of the university by addressing the world-class nature, or world-class accomplishments of the institution.

Yet it is far from clear what it means to be “world class.” Neither academic literature nor the academic managers themselves have clearly and definitively identified what exactly it means to be *world-class* as a university. The term is widely used. But its actual meaning in and outside of academe is far from clear.

Much of the previous work on university status is focused on the formal university rankings themselves, such as the Times Higher Education Supplement QS Ranking of World Universities (THES), the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), or the annual ranking of institutions in the U.S. by U.S. News & World Report (USN). Explorations of the ranking methodology abound (Billaut, Bouyssou, & Vincke, 2009; Bowman & Bastedo, 2011; Buela-Casal, Gutierrez-Martinez, Bermudez-Sanchez, & Vadillos-Munoz, 2007; Cheng, 2011; Ehrenberg, 2003). In addition, there are studies of the effects of ranking on institutions, which is useful in thinking about how institutions use rankings to drive policy or are driven by those ranking systems to try to improve their position in the market and attain or sustain world-class status (Ehrenberg, 2002; Hazelkorn, 2007; Salmi & Saroyan, 2007; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). It would appear that formal rankings of universities are here to stay, and are not likely to go away (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

Some research explores the efforts of individual institutions or geographic regions to develop world-class universities (Altbach & Balan, 2007; Salmi, 2009; Altbach & Salmi, 2011). There is some consensus that research production equates to world-class status (Niland, 2000, Marginson & van der Wende, 2007), noting that all ‘world-class’ institutions are themselves *research-intensive* universities (Altbach, 2007). One discussion of world-class universities argues that three forces must combine to create a perfect storm of possibility: concentration of talent, abundant resources, and favorable governance (Salmi, 2009). These three forces recognize what takes place in world-class institutions, but this argument does not illustrate what level the university must attain in any of these three areas in order to achieve world-class status as an institution. As a universal concept the term *world-class* remains unclear (Huisman, 2008).

Lack of clarity has done little to diminish international competition among and between universities. Universities are expected to internationalize (Marginson, 2006; Schriewer, 2009), increase their pull as a global institution and improve their global standing (Teichler, 2004). Some part of the university's status is connected to comparative legitimacy, as universities are expected to perform similar functions—such as provide student services or have football teams—in order to maintain legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional legitimacy is just one aspect of institutional theory, which argues that universities exist in an environment that drives them to similarity, that institutional isomorphism is inevitable as similar forces (external or internal) and history bring about similar outcomes in the agency itself (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, as one institution expands its enrollment base, others might feel pressure to do the same. As one increases a commitment to research through the construction of facilities such as research parks or athletics stadiums, others will mimic this behavior and develop comparative facilities (Cheslock & Knight, 2012; Link & Scott, 2007).

As institutions compete to draw international students, to win research grants, to build competitive facilities, and to increase their status in national and global rankings, the university president works to guide, to appear to guide, the institution toward some measure of success. The influence of the titular head of a university—in this study the president or vice-chancellor—relies on accepting that leaders play a significant role in guiding an institution, including through the stories they tell (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Leaders promote institutional legitimacy (Dacin, Ventresca, & Beal, 1999), and serve the purpose of rationalizing actions of the university and its culture (Birnbaum, 1988; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Previous research has investigated the role of the university president in securing funding (Cohen & March, 1986) and in measuring the relationship between the institution and its immediate community (Mars, c. 2012). Slaughter (1993) investigated the public testimony of university presidents to congress, as they promoted science and engineering research. In this, presidential discourse is taken as an authoritative data source on changing knowledge and learning regimes. Presidential speech serves many purposes, and may be relied upon to represent the university's official discourse. Indeed, the university president may be the single most influential or important agent of the institution (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013), promoting the university's mission, and acting as the university's foremost campus leader and chief executive officer (CEO), all while personifying the institution (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGB], 2010).

Universities exist in a global market, but the comparative nature of that market is uncertain. Vice-chancellors and presidents, acting as CEOs of the institution, are institutional agents in an unclear environment. Aspiration to world-class status is important for the university, and improving (or at least retaining) a university's rank is one measure of the institution's accomplishments. The institutional environment is global in nature, rather than simply local or national (Marginson & Rhoades, 2009), which lends to a lack of information on what one institution's competitors or peers are doing—not just at the university in the next city, but also in the next state, country, or continent. In the face of uncertain demands from the public, uncertain market expectations at a global scale, and uncertainty in the field of education and its institutional environment, universities are prone to mimic the activities of others in the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). As such, universities may mimic those activities perceived as successful at other institutions, *without* full knowledge of that institution's operational environment, the history leading to that endeavor, or even whether or not the endeavor is actually successful.

Lack of knowledge may indeed be a feature of the academic institutional environment. Due to the global nature of higher education, individual institutions increasingly compete with foreign entities. Global competition between two universities may even occur without either institution's awareness due to the vastness of the market. It may be impossible for a university to predict the competitive stance of its immediate neighbors, much less those universities abroad that are attempting to carve a niche in the market. Further, technological advances both empower and occlude the situation at a university, creating uncertainty in the environment.

In the face of such uncertainty, members of institutions may be prone to mimic the actions taken at other universities without access to their data, their decision process, their outcomes, their educational philosophy, their market demographic, or any of many other influences on institutional action. Without perfectly clear information—which may in fact be impossible in a technologically advanced, information-overloaded, and time-sensitive environment—universities look to the accepted leaders as icons for success. Whether these icons are actually successful, or even relevant to the project or issue at hand, is overwhelmed by their status as world-class universities. Institutional *status*, then, equates to organizational *model*, such that the competitive or reputational position of a world-class university in the higher education environment implies that its activities are the ideal, and its endeavors are normatively preferred.

Highly ranked, well respected, and internationally acclaimed institutions are the models for academic success, which lesser universities strive to mimic in an attempt to improve their own status. Perception of those top programs as world-class institutions often relies in considerable part on reputation as a measure of excellence, rather than solely on measurable outcomes or quantifiable endeavors. While institutions lower in status strive to improve their comparative positions by taking on the same goals and undertaking the same efforts perceived in the model institution, it is unclear if that perception actually represents the reality of which activities are valued in either type of university.

High-status institutions lead the charge for the rest of academe, but like a snake the perceived direction of the head is not necessarily apparent in the direction of the body (Reisman, 1958). Current direction at the head of the beast does not determine the direction traveled by the later segments, nor does the direction of the later segment imply the direction of the head. In this way, universities may mimic what they perceive as the direction of their aspirational models without a clear understanding of where those universities themselves are headed. Reisman's metaphor of the snake illustrates the difficulty of tracking the movement, direction, and momentum of universities in higher education. Further, it illustrates that the concept of 'world class' is potentially different at different positions of the field of higher education. Given the variety of schools present even at the very apex of the system, the expectations and activities of any given institution is not necessarily indicative of the system as a whole. Thus, it may be impossible to define what world class status is from a normative standpoint. This project intends to investigate different social constructions of the concept at different points in the system, to determine differentiation of status among different segments of the metaphorical snake.

While the literature is rife with explorations of what is common among world-class institutions (Altbach & Balan, 2007; Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008; Salmi, 2009; Marginson, 2006), there is less work on how those at the head of the snake, the leaders of the world-class hierarchy, are different. There is no research I am aware of on what the leaders of world-class institutions themselves portray as necessary to attain (or retain) world-class status. Leaders of institutions have an important role in both disseminating their institution's goals and aspirations, but also in motivating and guiding the school's aspirational agenda. They are the vocal architects of the university mission, encouraged by Reisman to be the "living embodiment of the mission of the institution" (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Thus, for an institution to be (or become) a world-class institution, it is important to understand how the managerial leaders of successful world-class universities position their institutions as successful, world-class universities and thus how they think about the concept of institutional status. This research is the first focusing on the role of the institutional leader in guiding a world-class institution, revealing what university leaders actually mean when they discuss their institutions in terms of world-class status, as prestigious universities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of status as presented in the public speeches of university presidents, chancellors, vice-chancellors, and rectors, as well as in the formal strategic plans driving their university's actions. These leaders present a narrative of their institution, providing a sort of story for that institution's position in the education market, whether that market is global or local. Exploring how these institutional leaders conceptualize their institution in world-class context provides a window to their thoughts on world-class institutions. How leaders of highly ranked universities address status in the university's environment, and to its constituencies, will provide a clearer picture of how leaders of world-class universities publicly present their institution's position in academia.

Further, it is important to recognize that there is a difference between the leader's rhetoric and the intended direction of the institution. While the institution is not a agent itself, the university has direction as revealed through the various official plans prepared by institutional leadership. Strategic plans exist as a public representation of the direction institutional leadership intends for the university, and may be taken as an artifact of intention for the university as a whole. Official university strategic plans are more dedicated and involved investments in institutional strategy. However, they are not a measure of the actual direction of the university. They are another, albeit more complicated and negotiated, piece of institutional rhetoric. In order to investigate this potential dichotomy, the leader's words will be compared with the strategic plans in order to determine if the rhetoric of the individual president or vice-chancellor—as found in the public speeches, letters, and addresses—contrasts with the institutional narrative presented in the university's plan. Between their public rhetoric and their institutional plans, it will be possible to identify the official narrative of status.

Chapter 2: Literature

This section addresses the current state of higher education, as well as the background to the issue being studied. This will begin with a brief historical overview of the university, specifically with attention to the UK and US context since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980's. Next, the global context of higher education is examined, followed by current issues driving the importance of status in a university. University leadership's role in the formation and presentation of institutional identity and comparative status is under-researched in higher education, so this component of the discussion will be explored through other fields outside of the study of higher education.

Recent history of universities in the United Kingdom

While the background of the British universities is long and storied, especially considering that Oxford and Cambridge date back nearly a thousand years, this section will explore the recent history of the university in the United Kingdom since the rise of neoliberalism. Prior to 1980, most universities in the UK were state-funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), but were primarily self-governed (Shattock, 2008). Self-governance was driven by a collegial structure, with the university's academics viewed as a community of scholars, none of whom were considered—or trained to be—university managers or academic chief executives (Deem, 1998). The standard of the university as a public entity, but run by its own stakeholders, dates back to the development of universities in the 11th century. While this status quo has been relatively stable for the measurable past, in the late 20th century the situation at universities in the UK began to change.

By the late 70's the UK had experienced much slower economic growth since the World War Two, as compared other OECD countries, and had fallen into an inflationary period due to the world economic depression (Williams, 2004). Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 on the platform of combatting and overcoming the inflation of the late 70's (Williams, 2004). By 1980 she had instituted sweeping change in the size of government, and government's role in the lives of the British. Among these changes was an increase in the importance of the UGC as a strategic planning body for the nation's universities (Shattock, 2008). Changes included pushing the university closer to the market, forcing institutions and the UGC to consider the impact of research, the marketability of programs, and imposed a 'new managerialism' on higher education (Deem, 1998), while imposing a neoliberal philosophy on the government's relationship with the public (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Competition in higher education was embraced, and international higher education was treated as a financial export. Within days of Thatcher taking office, proposals were created to eliminate subsidies for international students attending universities in the UK in an attempt to cut £100M from the UGC budget (Shattock, 2008).

The rise of neoliberal ideology in the UK drove the UGC, and ultimately the whole university culture, to embrace market-driven activity. Universities instituted tuition fees for students, reducing the subsidy from government, and had to answer to the UGC and its successor agencies for its spending (Shattock, 2008). University leaders had to respond to rising competition by acting as CEOs, which furthered the promotion of new managerialism by reducing collegiality, reducing institutional autonomy by promoting formula funding and earmarking, increased commercialization, and imposed some semblance of academic hierarchy within the institution (Deem, 1998; Shattock, 2008; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). In 1989 the UGC was disbanded and replaced first with the University Funding Council, and later (in 1992) the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC), increasing the government's oversight of and participation in British higher education (Shattock, 2008).

The center of government in the United Kingdom is Whitehall road in London, and it takes its name from this street. Whitehall is responsible for the majority of Her Majesty's governmental functions, as most of the departments and ministries are housed in the area. Whitehall has been dominated by Oxbridge graduates, from the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge (Horton, 2006). In the UK, department heads and ministers act as servants of the government rather than agents of a political party, such that the cultural influence of Oxbridge has had an indelible mark on Whitehall (Greer & Jarman, 2010). Increases in national enrollment figures in the UK led to higher education system moving from elite to mass-education (Horton, 2006), such that the Oxbridge influence in Whitehall has diminished in the last few decades, but almost half of Whitehall is run by graduates from those universities (Greer & Jarman, 2010). The influence of Oxbridge on Whitehall is important, but the rise of neoliberal policies has influenced its decline. Neoliberal reliance on expertise and managerial structures introduced the use of think tanks rather than relying on university-trained—and presumably university-loyal—Whitehall ministers (Horton, 2006), further reducing the self-governance of universities (Ball & Exley, 2010).

Thus, the British university is in a relatively new position of competition. Universities within the UK compete with each other for HEFC funding and competitive grants (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Williams, 2004), and are subject to increasing governmental oversight (Shattock, 2008). Recent commitments to the EU tie British institutions to their continental counterparts. The Bologna Process, started in 1999, intended to unify the European higher education area by 2010, and the UK has worked to participate as a member of the process by granting more positions to EU students, sending more British students abroad, as well as increasing their alignment with continental academic structures (Brooks & Waters, 2009; Wächter, 2004). Further, the rise of globalization and the international market in higher education is forcing British universities to compete with universities in the US and the EU for an increasingly global population, and to market themselves abroad for students from outside of the global west (Marginson, 2010; Brooks & Waters, 2009; Adelman, 2008).

Recent history of universities in the United States

While the history of higher education in the United States is not nearly as ancient as that of its European counterparts, U.S. universities have had comparatively greater success in some areas, with some universities becoming the international icons of higher education. This section will also explore the recent history of U.S. higher education since the rise of neoliberalism, the dominance of the U.S. research institution, and its place in the global higher education market. Unlike the system in place in the United Kingdom, the United States lacks a formal, national system of higher education, with individual states developing theoretically-unique university systems and private universities nominally acting on their own. However, while the U.S. can be said to have *at least* 50 ‘systems’ of higher education, isomorphic forces brought about great similarity between universities in public and private, state and regional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). As such, it is possible to discuss the U.S. ‘system’, without assuming that the concept requires some organizational uniformity in either purposeful design or common motivating oversight.

U.S. universities exist in an environment of varying funding models, but those schools considered world-class by their peers and in the various higher education rankings are uniformly focused on the production of research, with these research universities earning approximately 80% of all competitive government funds (Altbach, 2007). Indeed, this commitment to research and the associated dependence on governmental research funding a hallmark of the U.S. university. Prior to 1980, changes were underway that moved governmental and competitive support away from the institution itself, providing funding for students and research programs (McPherson & Schapiro, 1998; Kane, 1999). This shift coupled with a rise in attendance, that resulted in the massification of higher education, wherein greater than 50% of the college-age population was actually attending college (Trow, 1972, 1984; Peterson, 2007). However, as in the United Kingdom in the 70’s, the United States was suffering an economic depression and a shift in the expectations of government’s role in the lives of citizens. President Ronald Reagan followed Margaret Thatcher’s lead after the 1980 by imposing neoliberal ideology on government, and altering the future of higher education in the United States (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

In large universities neoliberal ideology led to a rise in research, the primacy of grant funding, and the stratification of competitive research-intensive institutions (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Reagan’s policies on higher education, as well as new laws like the Bayh-Dole act passed in 1980, encouraged universities to look to competitive sources of funds as well as profit-making ventures to fund educational activities (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Private entities increased applied-research funding, forming industry-university partnerships to address specific, marketable problems in the sciences (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The marketization of research, coupled with a rise in both private external funding and neoliberal approaches to education, led individual states to further reduce their subsidy to higher education (Winston, 1999; Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008). State reduction in education subsidy then led to an increased dependence on tuition as a source of income for universities (Griswold & Marine, 1996), changing the target of funding sources from the government, to the market, and finally to the student. Institutions respond in kind to economic and external forces, leading Universities to increasingly emphasize international income, to the export of education as a supplement for institutional budgets that did not strain shrinking bequests from the state (Codd, 2004; Welch, 2002; Harman, 2004; Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Hewett, 2010). Universities were forced to embrace capitalism as a source of funding, searching for whatever sources would support their institutional missions (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

These processes resulted in a continuation of earlier research successes, increasing the status of the United States as the world's first producer of academic knowledge (Marginson, 2010). The U.S. spends more money on higher education than any other nation (Altbach, 2007; Geiger, 1992; Clark, 2001), produces more highly-cited research than any other nation (Marginson, 2010), and attracts more international students than any other nation (OECD, 2007; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2009; Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Continuing dominance of higher education in a globalized market, the

U.S. enjoys first-mover benefits as one of the first university systems to embrace this funding-research-publication cycle. This first-mover advantage continues to aid in keeping the level of university performance high, and allows U.S. schools to enjoy a position of prestige in higher education around the world (Marginson, 2010). This virtuous cycle of support bringing success, breeding more support, which breeds further success, is concentrated in elite U.S. institutions (Bastedo & Bowman, 2010; Viner, Powell, & Green, 2004; Trow, 1984), again each of which is a research-intensive university placed well in the international hierarchy (Altbach, 2007).

Issues of status: International competition and isomorphism

Internationally, the cost of creating world-class research institutions leads to higher education systems differentiating their structures, with first-level or vocational institutions, colleges of further education or community colleges, education-focused baccalaureate institutions, and then a few elite research institutions focusing on knowledge production rather than broad education (Altbach, 2007). The United States and the United Kingdom were early in evolving their systems of higher education to attract increasing number of students, moving from elite-attendance rates to mass-attendance rates (Trow, 1972, 1984; Shattock, 2008; Marginson, 2006). Each country has layers within their higher education systems, such as community colleges, polytechnics, and other institutions providing postsecondary education. These layers allow for segregation and stratification of the system, concentrate talent at the top, and provide increased access and meet educational needs not served by traditional research universities (Trow, 1984; Hutcheson & Kidder, 2011; Jephcote & Raby, 2012).

Additionally, both nations have driven their academic funding models to increase reliance on tuition (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008; Kane, 1999; Shattock, 2008). Academic capitalism has altered the funding model for university research in many nations, not the least of which are the research-dominant U.K. and U.S. (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Further, globalization has altered the traditional nation-centric academic market, and international competition among universities for students, funding, and respect is increasing (Knight, 2003; Altbach, 2007; Alberts, 2007), while concern for international exports of higher education has increased in both nations (Adams, 2010; Marginson et al., 2010; Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Thus, younger, developing, or newer nations around the world mimic and adapt the U.S. model to their own systems of higher education in order to develop world-class research universities (Trow, 1972; Teichler, 2004). In the higher education literature, this mimicry is referred to as *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Three types of isomorphism cause a university to mimic other universities: *coercive isomorphism*, *normative isomorphism*, and *mimetic isomorphism*. Coercive isomorphism occurs when outside organizations upon which the universities rely create a climate of dependency for universities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: p. 150). Universities then respond in kind by adopting similar activities, as demanded, whether formally or informally, by the outside organization. One example of this is the national shift to provide performance-based research grants rather than block grants for pure science (Slaughter, 1993, Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Due to this shift in funding, institutions were *coerced* to focus on market-driven research in order to continue to receive research funds. Normative isomorphism occurs due to change in the professional nature of the institution

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). For instance, it is expected that a large university have a football team, offer courses in mathematics, and develop student affairs programs or divisions. Institutionally, it is ‘normal’ to have these features. Finally, mimetic isomorphism occurs when an institution purposefully mimics the actions or activities of another institution—usually in response to uncertainty, ambiguousness, or a incomplete understanding of the motivating pressure or potential solutions (p. 151). Mimetic isomorphism relies on the existence of another institution (whether in the same field or not) to have an enacted ‘solution’ to a perceived problem, which the first institution may copy and apply. The copying institution models the actions of the other institution, and the modeling institution need not realize the mimicry is taking place. As such, the copying institution may be applying only the perception of a solution without complete understanding of the rationale, effectiveness, or success of that activity in the original institution.

Rationalized myths are accepted components of organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Birnbaum, 1988), wherein the expectations of the university may be dependent upon a mythological archetype, regardless of its academic utility or institutional legitimacy. The archetype may be a socially-constructed community, or *Gemeinschaft*, which is closed to all but those admitted by existing members (Weber, 1921/2010). Once membership is attained, the member receives the status (or *honor*) appropriate to that station. In the realm of higher education, universities strive to join selective groups of institutions in order to objectively define their position of superiority to other universities (Trow, 1984). This enhances the university’s subjective reputation, by providing a veneer of prestige due to association, embedding institutional stratification in the field, and enhancing the competitive position in the market for higher education (Trow, 1984).

A lack of clarity on the environment of higher education leads to questions of legitimacy, such that universities are expected to conform to the norms of the institutional field. These widely-accepted expectations define the membership in the field, specifically that research-intensive, nationally-competitive universities like those in the Association of American Universities (AAU) or the Russell Group of research universities in the United Kingdom must also have a global capacity, attract international students and scholars, and in addition to meeting the demands and needs of local and national constituencies, these schools must undertake work that improves the world at large, beyond national borders (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013; Birnbaum, 1988; Veysey, 1965). Thus, the mission of a world-class research university dominant university is to pursue a research-intensive agenda, maintain a global capacity, attract international attention, and do beneficial work within the local, regional, national, and ultimately, the global community (Altbach, 2007). Committing to such a mission further strengthens the institutional norms for the field, and membership is dependent on continued subscription to and success in those activities.

Subscribing to and promoting activities which support this mission in turn improves the school's chances for success in an increasingly competitive market, as well as strengthen the legitimacy of the institution's membership in the field (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). While one might argue that centralized management is not the source of all status-bearing activity in an institution, the role of the institutional leader involves facilitating and supporting academic activities for the good of the institution (Rhoades, 2000). Further, in the globalized marketplace of 21^{st}-century higher education, institutional leaders are expected to act not as academics in a collegial environment, but increasingly as institutional CEOs (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; Deem, 1998). Universities are driven to adopt similar activities, such as the growth of research parks, dissemination of new programs such as MBA and applied engineering offerings, and internal offerings like student affairs programs. These phenomena are widely studied in the literature (Link & Scott, 2007; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Dacin et al., 1999; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Isomorphic behavior is not limited to institutions in the United Kingdom or the United States. Throughout the 20^{th} century, other universities in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, and later schools in Japan, China, and Korea, attempted to mimic the successes of the U.S. model for higher education. These nations each sought to increase enrollment in higher education from previous elite levels (attendance of 15% or less) to mass levels (greater than 15% attendance), following the American lead (Trow, 1972; Teichler, 2004), while students from these and many other countries sought to attain degrees and training in North America.

Global student and scholar mobility focused on North America throughout much of the 20^{th} century (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). As more students came from outside the global west, many ideas, features, and expectations from the research-model of higher education were exported to their home countries, normalizing the expectations at home with their western experience. Further, in many nations with more centralized or socialized education systems, greater funding was available to implement what appeared to be successful changes. As such, the international model of higher education is predominantly modeled on the western research model, with other nations continually working to increase their stake of the international education market.

Similarity in the structure and philosophy of education has generally normalized the international education market. In the 21st century, education has become a global market (Altbach et al., 2009). More nations rely on a greater part of educational exports, and focus a greater portion of their energy to student mobility than in prior decades (Marginson et al., 2010). The U.S.'s historic status as the most attractive destination for international education is slipping (Chow & Bhandari, 2010), as the number of foreign students coming to the U.S. has diminished after the events of 9/11 (Alberts, 2007). U.S. institutions are seeing a pinch in international higher education, and are competing with new entrants into the global field of higher education.

One manifestation of this increased global competition is the rise of international rankings, with special attention paid to the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Times Higher Education Supplement QS Ranking of World Universities (THES), and predominantly among schools within the United States, the annual ranking by U.S. News and World Report (USN). While the scholarly value of these rankings may be suspect (Altbach, 2006; Dill & Soo, 2005; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007), governments, institutions, parents, and especially students use them to make comparisons (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Ehrenberg, 2002). At the governmental level, some nations utilize the rankings to justify policy changes, goals, and expectations, such that national systems are the result of strategic policy decisions driven to improve competitive advantage for university exports of higher education (Teichler, 2004; Bastedo & Bowman, 2011; Hazelkorn, 2007). Strategic policy in higher education has increased as a function of competitiveness and is more common outside the United States than within, leading to system-wide advances in some countries. Within the U.S., the isolated nature of individual state and private systems limits any unified, nationwide strategic higher education policy.

Research institutions in the United States, and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom, find themselves in a new position. Decreased funding from the state, coupled with increased expectations of accountability, forces schools into a dichotomous position of competing nationally and internationally for funds, while striving to serve the needs of the local constituency. Rising competition from abroad increases the importance of making a university attractive, while also making it difficult to ensure that the school maintains its market-share of expected educational export. Throughout the 20th century, western universities tended to compare themselves to each other—Harvard and Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge, MIT and Cal Tech—without much consideration of what happened outside of that narrow band of their peers (Ben-David & Zloczower, 1962). Rankings and other comparative measures are motivating these universities to pay attention to the international market, regardless of the validity of these ranking schemes.

Institutional Status

As evidenced by the virtuous cycle of funding and research, the position of a university in the hierarchy of universities has an impact on the university’s ability to ascend or retain its status. While this status may be illustrated by a comparative rank on one of the league tables, it also reflects a perception of the university’s comparative research capacity, quality of knowledge production, and other subjective comparisons by others in the field. Such status is epistemic, in that the perception of status is controlled by the perceiving agent as an evaluation of the honor and prestige of the institution (Trow, 1984; Weber, 2010). Such an evaluation may rely on objective measurements such as annual research expenditures or member of the national academies. Evaluations of status also rely on subjective determinations, which may differ between members of the professoriate, administrators, the public, legislatures, and students themselves (Trow, 1984).

Universities in the United States are inherently perceived as high-status institutions due to the history of U.S. institutions being perceived as deserving high status (Marginson, 2010). This type of first-mover benefit accrues to all institutions in the system, but is concentrated among those schools at the reputational (and thus funding- and research-receiving) elite. International status is recognized by a number of factors, including research productivity and research expenditures, as well as international ranking (Salmi & Saroyan, 2007). While the amount of research funding or productivity is occluded in academic reports, an institution's rank is quickly and publicly available from a number of (often conflicting) sources. The use of institutional rank as a measure of status is growing as (regardless of the methodological problems associated with the various ranking systems), institutions pay attention to their position in the hierarchy with both positive and negative effects (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

In fact, a majority of institutions are unhappy with their current rank and want to improve their position nationally or internationally, with most institutions yearning to be in the top 10% nationally, and the top 25% internationally (Hazelkorn, 2008: 195). Institutions use ranking to calibrate themselves to their peers, and inform decision-making processes for institutional strategy (Hazelkorn, 2007). Ranking systems have increased the amount of attention institutions pay to competition, considering their ranked peers as well as their aspirational peers as targets for increased attention (Ehrenberg, 2002). Clearly, status—at least as measured by rankings—is a significant component of the higher education institution.

International rankings purport to measure academic quality in a quantitative, comparative manner, using a number of metrics including academic reputation, student selectivity, resources, retention rates, and academic performance. Each ranking uses its own formula, so a comprehensive list of rank-producing activities may be impossible. There are differences in how each ranking system evaluates both the objective components (spending, retention, awards, and faculty membership in national academies, among others) with the subjective components (reputation as perceived by other institutional leaders, among others). These factors, and others, attempt to define the best universities in the region, league, nation, or world. However, due to the nature of these quantitative measures, it is unclear that their findings have legitimate value. Manipulation of the rankings is possible, as some measures rely on self-reported data. For instance, leaders filling out the surveys used to measure the reputation of the institution may improve the position of their own institution by lowering their evaluation of the reputation of their peer-institutions (Ehrenberg, 2002), while the influence of pre-existing rankings provide future evaluations with biased results (Bowman & Bastedo, 2010). Student selectivity is determined by the number of students rejected by the institution, which allows for manipulation of the admissions process in order to maximize the number of students refused entry (Ehrenberg, 2002; 2003).

Ranking systems generally fail to measure learning outcomes, relying predominantly on the weight of input measures such as student and faculty quality, and numeric outcomes such as research expenditures and publications (Dill & Soo, 2005). High rank reflects research productivity published in English, and promotes the norms of top-tier universities such as Harvard or Oxford, fails to measure the actual learning outcomes for the students involved (Altbach, 2006). Resources available to the institution, whether from grants, tuition, endowments, or other sources, accrue to institutions stronger in the hard sciences, especially those with medical schools. ARWU relies on only one measure to determine quality of education: the number of alumni receiving the Nobel Prize of the Fields Medal, which further emphasizes medical and hard science as a proponent of quality (Billaut et al., 2010). Reliance on the hard sciences demeans the value of the social sciences, humanities, and arts (Altbach, 2006). Beyond individual methodology, a more philosophical problem with rankings comes from the purpose for which they are made: to sell to the public. Ranking products from U.S. News to Times Higher Education are published *for a profit*, and while continuous revision of the methodology provides a veneer of academic integrity it does nothing to overcome the question of journalistic integrity inherent to the process (Bowden, 2000).

University Leader as CEO

Leaders and leadership are inherently intertwined terms. While there are many definitions of leadership, a consensus agrees that it is a process of influencing a group to accomplish a unified mission or goal (Northouse, 2004). Individuals instrumental in that influential process might be called leaders. Within the context of a university, there is usually a single person elected or hired to act as the institutional leader—the president, chancellor or vice-chancellor, or rector. The titular head of a university is situated in the geography of the institution to influence the manner in which member and stakeholders further the university's mission. At the level of world-class institutions, which is frequently equated to research-intensive institutions (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Salmi, 2009), the overarching mission the leader attempts to further is that of research and the creation of new knowledge, and does so not as an academic leading a collective of academics, but as the chief management officer or CEO of the organization (AGB, 2010; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; Deem, 1998).

For the purpose of this research, the CEO of the university is the varyingly-titled campus leader for the institutions involved. In the U.K., this is invariably the vice-chancellor. Normatively, this implies another executive of higher rank: the chancellor. But in the U.K. the chancellor is a politically-appointed campus representative with little day-to-day oversight of the institution. In the U.S., campus leaders are usually called either president or chancellor. In some systems the chancellor is the head of a campus (such as at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln), or the head of a state system (such as at the greater University of Texas and the University of California). In the Texas state system, with a chancellor at the helm, the campus of the University of Texas at Austin is managed by a president. At the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, the campus is managed by the chancellor and the system is managed by a president. Due to the various methods of titling campus leaders collectively, I instead use the terms *president* (U.S.) and *vice-chancellor* (U.K.) to represent the position of the academic CEO.

Early research on the role of presidents of universities argued that they, rather than the members of their institutions, were more likely to act as the public and political face of the institution in matters that led to funding and representation (Cohen & March, 1986). Speeches of university presidents have been examined to determine the institution's commitment to certain initiatives, and as interpretation of the institutional mission (Slaughter, 1993; *Mars, forthcoming*). The academic CEO, as well as CEOs of private corporations, is expected to develop a 'face' for the organization within the institutional field. Presidents and vice-chancellors are expected to market their institution, to provide a façade of both continuity and progress, in a manner that stabilizes the political status of the university. Furthermore, they are expected to both provide purpose for the institution—combining disparate visions of the university into one coherent mission—as well as explaining what the institution asks of its members as a function of this mission (Sergiovanni, 1998). These guiding actions allow the university to continue to compete for resources and power, and further provide legitimacy to the actions of the university (Birnbaum, 1988).

By promoting the mission of the institution as a global competitor, these individuals admit their universities into the selective group of internationalized education establishments, but do so through rhetorical methods only. The campus leader puts the face of the university on display through their speeches and presentations to the public, their constituencies, and other audiences. They *appear* to subscribe to accepted practices, and thus "increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). Efficacy of the proposed or reported activities is unnecessary, as the value comes from subscribing to the myth that some form of internationalization in education is inherently good (Schriewer, 2009). Thus, presidents and vice-chancellors are in a unique position to illustrate their institution's position in the global education market, to discuss and address institutional status, to support and recognize the successes of the university and its members, and to reveal plans for future activities. When these presidents or vice-chancellors address their constituents, they identify the direction of the university, as well as where it has been.

Direction, physics, and the official narrative

As presidents and vice-chancellors publicly promote their institutions, they reveal institutionalized conceptions of what they perceive as successes and as appropriate directions for the university's future. They signal where the university is, where it is going, and how it is going to get there. A measurement of those three components—location, direction, and velocity—may reveal the university's official narrative of status. By measuring or predicting an elite university's direction, other institutions might have a basis to mimic those efforts to attain similar status. Indeed, institutional theory argues that due to field-level institutional isomorphism each university should be attempting similar activities, attempting to attain similar goals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Those activities and goals should reflect on similar patterns in a globalized, competitive market, all of which should be revealed through the narratives promoted by the presidents and vice-chancellors. Further, it is normatively preferable to attempt these goals in order to develop and promote institutional legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Dacin et al., 1999). Therefore, presidents and vice-chancellors should be presenting a field-unified view of what counts as sufficient accomplishment for a university, uniform conceptions of quality and of institutional direction, and a similar narrative of status. Coupling this with institutional stratification implies that universities of lower status would be mimicking the activities and direction of higher-status institutions, such that the institutional narrative presented by the presidents and vice-chancellors should follow those set forth by higher status universities. Perception of the direction of high status universities is expected to impart motivation to universities of lower status.

However, applying institutional theory assumes that it possible to measure or detect each component of the university's state in the field. Heisenberg (1927), with his groundbreaking *uncertainty principle* gave physics a theoretical construct that is important to understand in this context. The uncertainty principle argued that due to the nature of motion, it is impossible to know both location and momentum of any moving object. Due to the movement, location is constantly shifting, and to freeze time in order to pin down location eliminates any momentum or velocity. While regularly applied to physics, Reisman (1958) applied the basis of the uncertainty principle to organizational theory, developing the metaphor of the snake. If the field of higher education can be perceived as a snake moving across the sand, any attempt to measure any single part of the snake is not likely to reflect on the direction, location, or velocity or the entire snake. For our purposes, looking at higher education, the snake represents the field, and any given part of the snake is an individual university. Those at the head of the snake are responsible for the overall direction of the body. As other universities mimic the activities of those ahead of them in status, they attempt to get where those before them have been. This process is eternal, with the tail never catching the head. Further, since latter segments are incapable of truly perceiving the activities of the head, they must limit their mimicry to those immediately in front of them. Since the snake does not move in a straight line in order to go in any direction, looking at the segment ahead does not reveal direction of the whole, nor does looking at the location or speed reveal the location and speed of the whole. The uncertainty principle limits the perceptions of those behind the tip, and the nature of the snake itself masques its overall intentions. In this context, my argument is that even those universities already internationally recognized by their peers and the international community are not moving in the same direction; the direction of those at the top of the field, or the tip of the snake, do not reveal their intentions to those much further behind them, such that those latter institutions may be mimicking what they *believe* is the intended direction of the field, but do so based on incomplete information. Applying the metaphor of the snake to official narratives of academic status means that universities will have divergent goals, reveal divergent plans, and the expected institutional isomorphism of the field will not be present.

Chapter 3: Methods and Data

In light of the lack of research into the official narrative of status and its differentiation by presidents and vice-chancellors, this project investigates how university leaders promote their institutions in the context of discussions about world-class institutions. This section begins with the guiding research question, and then define the terminology of the question in order to clarify the empirical focus and scope of the study. The data set is identified, and the institutional sample is explained, followed by a discussion of the study's methodology.

This project investigates the official university narrative of status. In order to detect this narrative, several questions guide the research to the overall results. One component of the study looks at how narratives vary among research universities of differing levels of status. Another component looks at how official narratives vary in relation to the onset of a global economic recession in 2008. The project design also embeds cross-national analysis, exploring differences between comparable universities in the United Kingdom and the United States, yielding a comparative consideration of narratives of status. Each of these three components are a piece of the greater puzzle of identifying and examining official narratives of institutional status as articulated by the chief executive leadership of research universities. The primary research questions are:

1. What narratives about institutional status are articulated in official university discourse at research universities, specifically in the public speeches and communications of university presidents and vice-chancellors, and in institutional strategic plans?

2. To what extent and how do these official university narratives about institutional status vary among universities at and below the apex of the world-class tier of research universities?
3. To what extent and how do official university narratives about institutional status vary over time, specifically before and after the global recession of 2008?
4. To what extent and how do official university narratives about institutional status vary by country specifically between universities in the United Kingdom and the United States?

Definitions

Narrative

For the purposes of this project the concept of *narratives* follows Slaughter's (1993) work on official university discourse, which investigated and identified themes of discourse present in the testimony of university presidents before congress. Slaughter (1993) identified themes present in multiple sources to develop the concept of *narrative*, arguing that leaders position themselves (as professionals) and their institutions (as mediators) in proximity to social and educational ideals through the narrative they use to describe their institutional science policy. Narratives do not rely on the measurable veracity of the statements made by presidents and vice-chancellors. Rather, they combine story, emotion, phrasing, and performance to portray a semblance of the evolving, nuanced view of the university (Slaughter, 1993). Further, the context of this discourse reveals a broader consensus about the overall narrative, rather than the actual opinions or beliefs of the individual president or vice-chancellor. Whether a university representative personally believes what s/he says to Congress is true or best or normatively advantageous is beside the point; the presidents or vice-chancellors is acting as a leader, as a representative of the group, and is presenting on the broad consensus of academic science. I do not intend to interrogate the personal opinions and beliefs of presidents and vice-chancellors, as the public statements serve the *office* of the institutional leader, and represent the institutional narrative. Thus, the president or vice-chancellor acts to address the institutional map, the institutional strategy, or the institutional belief about what is valuable. By selecting testimony from a core, respected cadre of institutional leaders, Slaughter (1993) extended this institutional consensus from the individual institution to the broad field of universities in academic science. The testimony or speeches of presidents and vice-chancellors at world-class universities thus provides a window to the broader institutional narrative within the environment of world-class universities.

Later work continues this tradition of seeking common themes in order to identify a narrative. Political discourse may be found to promote an agenda or ideology, such that the narrative developed becomes entrenched in the public sphere to a point that it (the narrative) no longer needs to be explained (Slaughter and Cantwell, 2011). Narratives may be identified through regularly occurring storylines (Gerteis, 2002), and represent an acknowledgement of the developed sociocultural knowledge associated with the topics (Ewick & Sibley, 2003). The institutional narrative does not rely on, nor does it necessarily reflect, institutional ideology. Ideologies tend to be static in nature, focus on the balance of power, and are often contested in the political arena. The goals of the university and the interpretation of its mission are not fixed institutional philosophies debated and promoted in this type of public venue. Institutional narratives include ideas, contain emotional content, and allow for revision and revocation (Slaughter, 1993).

An official *institutional narrative* reflects the agenda promoted by the formal leaders of an institution (Slaughter and Rhoades, 1996). Agenda-serving communication from the institution formulates a sort of social contract between the university and society, identifying the goals of the institution, its accomplishments, the intended direction, and the value of each of these institutional aspects to the community (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2005). This contract is encompassed in a *narrative of intention*—the institutions stated responses to whatever internal or external forces influencing the university—and ultimately work to guide the perspective of the constituency regarding these forces in a *narrative of expectation* (Vitullo and Johnson, 2010).

The current project develops a view of narrative as couched in the positions of presidents and vice-chancellors as they address the concept of status in the overarching accomplishments, intentions, and expectations of the institution. The narrative they develop speaks to their goals for the university, identifies what institutional accomplishments they (if not their institutions) value, and illustrates the general overarching storyline of the institutional agenda. Further, presidents and vice-chancellors know their audience. Primarily, the narrative is promoted to the members of the university community: faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders such as boards of governance or regents. However, the narrative is delivered as either a public event or to a public audience, and attendance or access is usually not formally restricted by membership, such that while the primary, or initial, audience consists of faculty, staff, students, and immediate community members, the dialogue is presented to the greater public at large. The president or vice-chancellor must realize that the narrative balances on selling the ideas and goals of the institution to both internal and external constituencies and craft their messages appropriately. I look at how the institutional agenda is revealed through the narrative, specifically in terms of institutional status.

Status

In order to constrain the focus of this research, the narratives studied in the first part of this study are limited to those addressing some aspect of institutional status. Universities are members of an institutional community, within the field of higher education. Status in this community is determined in a number of ways. These may include objective accomplishments such as total research production in highly respected journals, competitive research funding awards, admission, retention/persistence, and graduation rates, or the number of prestigious awards received by members of the community. Status is also measured through subjective accomplishments, such as comparative prestige, institutional reputation, and perception of quality. Traditional conceptions of status rely on the level of positive or negative social assessment, and membership in the status-group is usually socially-constructed, inherently exclusive, and grants legitimacy to members (Weber, 1921/2010).

Status, in higher education, is an underdeveloped concept. One may argue that status is represented by institutional rank, or merely by reputation. Status is more than a single indicator or metric, usually the result of unique historical events or circumstances, such that high-status universities benefit from their continuity in ways that lower-status universities do not (Trow, 1984). Indeed, *status* is rarely used in a vacuum, usually combined with those modifiers to indicate comparative relationships as ‘higher’ or ‘lower’.   Thus, status is a component of social class distinctions, defining members of communities within the greater field. Mobility within the field is dependent on leveraging institutional status, improving station within the field, and accruing the benefits of the higher classes (Trow, 1984).

For this project, I embrace the subjective/objective duality of status, as presidents and vice-chancellors recognize a variety of accomplishments and initiatives to signal their institution’s status in the field of higher education. The statements made by presidents and vice-chancellors act to place the university within the greater field of higher education, and I rely on a segment of these statements as representative of certain status-bearing behaviors. In higher education, the concept of “world-class” is more prevalent than is institutional status. Much work has been done to define the features of world-class universities, as nations attempt to build new world-class institutions or systems, and individual universities strive improve their standing in the greater education market. In order to identify statements of status, I rely on the combination of factors found to exist in world-class universities: concentration of talent, abundant resources, and favorable governance (Salmi, 2009; Altbach & Salmi, 2011). These three factors are each individually binary, with reflections of both subjective and objective accomplishments. For instance, concentration of talent may be either the measurable quality of talent, or the perceived quality of talent. Abundant resources are more than financial or physical resources, but additional subjective resources such as longevity or engaged alumni. Favorable governance may represent legislative endeavors to enhance the university, or a more nuanced environment of support, not codified in law, which enables risk-taking.

Comparative movement within each of these three factors is expected to reveal a glimpse at institutional status. Competitive success within the field of higher education is affected by academic status (Trow, 1984), and may manifest in increased funding, higher rank in league tables, greater perceived standing among peer-institutions, or other indicators of place within the community. Therefore, when looking at the concept of institutional status, this project focuses on those three pre-established factors—concentration of talent, abundance of resources, and favorable governance—determined to reflect on whether an institution is a world-class entity in the greater higher education market. Each of these components of world-class universities is addressed in the official discourse—whether through speech, address, oration, letter, or strategic plan.

Official University Discourse

While previous work focused on presidents' official testimony in government hearings, I expand the concept of testimony to include university leaders' public addresses as well as the published plans developed by the university. Each of the sampled addresses is available as a public document, and individually they present the audience with a glimpse of the institutional narrative regarding status. While they may not have been written by the presidents or vice-chancellors themselves, the act of presenting them in a public forum indicates that the content is endorsed, and thus official university discourse (Slaughter, 1993). As a whole, the documents present a combined illustration of what the official leaders of the university say about institutional status, and reveal differences between institutional types and geographies. Initially, I intended to use each annual State of the University Address from the institutions in the sample. I assumed that due to isomorphic forces at work in academe, each university in the sample would have such an annual address. However, the variety of university annual addresses was striking, such that *official university discourse* includes several different types of presentation at the selected institutions. This data sample includes the annual *State of the University Address* (15) from Nebraska (5), Stony Brook (5), and the University of Texas (5). Other formal annual speeches to the university community of varying types and names include: *Annual Address*,given at Cambridge (5), the annual *Oration* given at Oxford (5), and the annual *Convocation Welcome* given at Princeton (5). At Harvard, the format was varied, and included a *Letter to the Community* (1), an *Annual Report* (1), and President Faust's *Welcoming and Address* (4). MIT did not have a formal annual address, but the President regularly delivered a *Letter to the MIT Community* each semester (and sometimes more than once per semester), of which 9 are included. Finally, at Leeds and Newcastle the Vice-Chancellor does not give an annual address. Instead, they pen a forward to an annual report which is delivered in a published document for their community. Leeds' *Annual Report and Accounts* (5) and Newcastle's *Profile and Annual Review* (3) are included. Finally, in order to represent the university's long-term goals and to supplement the intentional content of the various 'speeches', Strategic Plans were included from four universities (Leeds, Nebraska, Newcastle, and Oxford) and also the system-based strategic plan for the State Universities of New York, to represent Stony Brook. Texas's strategic plan was a retrospective on the 125th anniversary rather than a formal planning document, so it was excluded, while the other universities did not produce a formal strategic plan.

An annual *State of the University Address* is generated at many institutions. These addresses are usually given to a collection of stakeholders that includes the university's faculty, and often include the various Regents or Governing Boards. Frequently students are one of the intended constituencies to whom the address is targeted, but only in part as the content is generally geared toward the faculty and staff of the university. In no instance is it clear that the general public is excluded from these addresses, and the final speech or document is made generally available through the university's press office and web site. Thus, the audience for these addresses is the close university community, as well as the public at large. A State of the University Address was generated at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and delivered by Chancellor Harvey Perlman, at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and delivered by Presidents Shirley Strum Kenny and Samuel L. Stanley, Jr., and at the University of Texas at Austin where each address was delivered by President William J. Powers, Jr. In each case, the university president or vice-chancellor delivered the address to a collected body of the university community, and the address was later made public through either publication or dissemination on the university web site. At Oxford University, the Vice-Chancellor gives an annual speech, called the annual *Oration*, which follows the format of a State of the University Address. The oration is delivered to the Chancellor, members of *Congregation*, the university's governing body which comprises over 3,700 members, and is then published in the Oxford Gazette for public dissemination. Vice-Chancellor John Hood presented the annual oration from 2006–2008, and his successor, Vice-Chancellor Andrew Hamilton delivered the orations for 2009–2010.

Other university presidents and vice-chancellors deliver annual addresses of some kind, and while not called an annual state of the university address, these presentations tend to serve the same purpose. At the University of Cambridge, an annual public address is given to Regent House, the university's governing body, which comprises over 3,800 members from various components of the university community. The *Annual Address to The Regent House* is given each fall, was delivered by Dame Alison Richard for the years 2006–2009, and by Sir Leszek Borysiewicz in 2010, and later made public through electronic and print dissemination. At Princeton University, President Shirley M. Tilghman delivers an annual speech to the community at the fall convocation ceremony, entitled the *Opening Exercises Greeting and Address*. While these speeches tend to be directed primarily to the new members of the Princeton community, students, faculty, and staff alike, they invariably include a celebration of the accomplishments from the prior year.

Some universities present a review of the prior year and the direction for the future through an annual report, usually carefully published with full-color graphics and a uniform stylistic presentation for each year. In each case of a published annual report, the vice-chancellor includes a forward, which is followed by a report on the university's activities, accomplishments, and accounts. Vice-Chancellor Michael J. P. Arthur of the University of Leeds penned a forward to each *Annual Report and Accounts* for 2005/06 through 2010/11. Vice-Chancellor Chris Brink of Newcastle University is responsible for the forwards to the annual reports from 2007–2010. Both Leeds and Newcastle present these reports on glossy, magazine-style paper, complete with graphs and data, various reports from within the university, and an extended evaluation of university accomplishments and direction.

Some universities update their communities through various letters to the community. At Harvard University, the president's office presents a *Letter to the*

Community, usually in the form of a welcome letter to the new academic year. Some of these are presented in print or published form, as was delivered by outgoing president Lawrence H. Summer in the spring of 2006 (directed to the Harvard community), and the annual report delivered by interim president Derek Bok in the annual report for 2006–2007 (directed to the Members of the Board of Overseers). Those given by President Drew Faust from 2007–2010 include letters to the Harvard community (2007, 2008) and addresses to the Harvard community (2009, 2010), each of which was made public through electronic means. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, President Susan Hockfield penned many *Letters to the MIT Community* which were published through press releases, disseminated through electronic mail to the constituency, and published on the university web site. The MIT letters were more frequent and were thus purposefully sampled in order to represent those best representing Hockfield's once-per-semester update to the university community.

Finally, some universities develop formal strategic plans to illustrate their current and future interpretation of the university mission. These documents provide the institution with a formal plan for a sequence of years, during which the goals and aspirations of the institutions, laid out in the plan, are to be pursued. While leadership presentations such as addresses and orations provide a general roadmap for the future, they do so in general terms, declaring the institution's goals in broad strokes. Strategic plans are usually far more specific, with a greater focus on data analysis and planning, and are usually developed by a committee or focus group within the university at large (rather than by the individual university leader or, perhaps, the speechwriter). Strategic plans are designed to guide the direction of the institution for a number of years, in some cases for over a decade. These documents are usually developed by a committee within the institution, comprising the president or vice-chancellor, various members of upper administration, and pertinent faculty members or representatives from a faculty senate or other body.

While strategic plans may not be intended as checklists for action, they do illustrate where the university intends to focus, how certain issues will be revisited, and what accomplishments or priorities are brought to the fore (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Strategic plans may be used as guideposts, as metaphors for continuity and direction, or as propaganda pieces, such that the university's constituency has access to an understanding of institutional direction. Further, strategic plans are intended to inform both internal and external stakeholders, delivering a sense of institutional purpose or direction to the reader, and illustrate the university's commitment to a thoughtful, deliberation. Accreditation bodies require such planning documents to illustrate a university's evaluation processes, and budgeting agencies look to these documents as assurance of fiscal responsibility. As such, strategic plans provide the audience with an idea of where the institution has publicly committed to go in the future, while the presidential address provide the audience with examples of where the institution has been.

Again, I assumed that due to institutional isomorphism each research university in the sample would produce a formal strategic plan. However, MIT, Princeton, and Cambridge do not produce, or do not publicly disseminate, university strategic plans. UT created a commission report on the 125th anniversary of the school's founding containing history and intended future direction, but I chose not to include it as it fundamentally differed from other strategic plans by being predominantly celebratory and reflective of the past, while being far more long-term in the future, aimed at a 25-year strategy rather than the standard 5–10 years of other plans. Harvard published a strategic plan in 2006, but it was limited to faculty development. Further, individual colleges and departments at Harvard, UT, Princeton, Cambridge, and MIT produced strategic plans, but none of these were intended to be institutional plans. The final set includes plans from Oxford (2008), Leeds (2009), Nebraska (2008), Newcastle (2010), and Stony Brook (2010).

Sample

University leaders, including presidents or chancellors (in the United States) and vice-chancellors (in the United Kingdom), give many speeches each year. Many leaders, especially in the United States, give an annual State of the University Address. In the United Kingdom universities have a different governance structure. While the titular head of the institution is usually the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor is the academic head responsible for the governance of the university. Vice-Chancellors frequently give annual orations and other speeches before the community, and pen articles and introductions to university reports and publications. State of the University addresses are generally given in the fall before a collection of students, administration staff, faculty, and members of the community. Vice-Chancellor addresses have a less-uniform structure, but are generally aimed at the broad university community. In either case, these presentations are generally of limited length, with the range falling between approximately 20 and 30 minutes, provide an overview of the university’s major accomplishments for the prior year, and give a general overview of the intended direction for the coming year.

Institutional Sample

In order to develop a clear representation of how university discourse addresses status, this project is designed around two binary collections of universities, organized around status and country. To represent those institutions with high status, I have included five world-class institutions, three from the United States (Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Princeton), and two from the United Kingdom (Cambridge and Oxford). These institutions were selected for a number of reasons, including ease of data collection, commonality of international reputation (Cheng, 2011), and membership in their respective national research organizations: Harvard, MIT, and Princeton are members of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and Oxford and Cambridge are members of the Russell Group of research institutions in the UK. Together, these schools represent a recognizable cross-section of highly-respected, world-class institutions. In terms of the Reisman thesis (Reisman, 1958), these institutions should be the head of the academic snake, leading the direction of tertiary education in research institutions. In this project, these five schools are labeled the elite group.

In order to provide a binary comparison, I have included five additional schools in the analysis. Again, three are from the United States (the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL), the State University of New York at Stony Brook (Stony Brook), and the University of Texas at Austin (UT)), while two are from the United Kingdom (the University of Leeds and Newcastle University). Each of these institutions is also a research-intensive institution and a member of their respective national research organizations during the timespan under scrutiny. While not as highly ranked or widely recognized as the five universities in the elite group, these five schools are in their own right well-respected research universities, ranked in several measures among the top universities in the world. In terms of the Reisman thesis (1958), these universities are arguably not the tail of the world-class university body, but are placed further up the animal, perhaps closer to the neck. The universities in this group have another commonality—each university strives to improve its standing in the international community, improving its status as a world-class university. Thus, for this project these schools comprise the aspirational group [Figure 1].

Selecting institutional members of the aspirational group was done purposefully. I intended to provide a contrasting group of organizations to the elite set, but wanted to retain as much institutional similarity as possible. In each case, both elite and aspirational, membership in the AAU or the Russell Group was paramount. Then, I required that the aspirational universities be *lower* in annual research expenditures than their elite counterparts, among the membership of the national research associations. Additionally, each university in the aspirational group is consistently ranked outside the top-most tier (Cheng, 2011). Each U.S. university in the aspirational sample is a *very high research activity* university in the Carnegie classification system. Finally, the last requirement was of convenience, in that the data was readily available for each university in the aspirational sample.

Comparing the elite group of universities with the aspirational group allows for further analysis. Each U.S. university in the elite group—Harvard, MIT, Princeton—is a private institution, while those in the aspirational group—Nebraska, Stony Brook, Texas—are public universities. This is not accidental, in that the Association of American

Universities comprises a collection of both public and private institutions. This variance allows for further inspection of differences within the field of U.S., research-intensive, world-class higher education, and provides a more natural representation of the narrative among AAU universities. Again, in terms of the Reisman thesis (1958), this binary comparison allows comparison between the head of the snake and the neck or body, but also allows for comparison between world-class private research universities in the United States, and world-class public research universities in the United States.

Within the data sample, formal State of the University Addresses were given at the University of Texas at Austin (n=5), Oxford University (n=5), SUNY Stony Brook (n=5), and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (n=5). The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge gives an annual speech to the Regent House (n=5), the official governing body of the university. Although these are not titled State of the University addresses, they touch on the same content found in the other speeches. At Harvard, the president gives an address to the community and the board of overseers (n=6), again, touching on the same topics and in the same style as a state of the university address, but usually titled *Welcome to the New Academic Year*. At some institutions, the president or vice-chancellor does not provide a formal annual address, providing other types of communication. At MIT, the university president delivers messages to the MIT community through a digital medium, published on the web page of the Office of the President and sent to members via email. These messages are more frequently called *letters* (n=6) but also labeled *message* (n=3). The MIT letters are more frequent than formal addresses, but are generally shorter in nature, and on two occasions they were topical, focusing on MIT’s financial situation. At the Universities of Leeds (n=5) and

Newcastle (n=3), the Vice-Chancellors penned forwards to their universities' annual reports. These forwards do not seem to have been presented as speeches, and upon asking their secretaries, I was told they did not give formal speeches of the state of the university variety. The annual report forwards address the mission, the accomplishments, and the goals of the institution just as would be found in a formal speech. Finally, at Princeton, the president gives an introductory speech to the members of the community at the university's opening exercises (n=5). These remarks are usually a brief welcome to the new members of the Princeton community, but include notable accomplishments and goals for the academic year. In all, 53 speeches, letters, or addresses were collected for the data set.

This project relies upon a wide selection of individual documents. These come from the aforementioned presidential addresses, state of the university addresses, vice-chancellor's orations, forwards to official university publications such as the University of Newcastle's *Annual Review and Report,* and other directed communications from university leadership to the university community. Additionally, I have included a small selection of strategic plans. Fifty-three speeches, letters, and addresses (SLAs) given by university leadership between 2006 and 2010 were collected from ten institutions in the United States (6) and United Kingdom (4). Each of the SLA's was purposefully sampled to provide, on average, one per year per university. President Hockfield at MIT provided a *Letter to the MIT Community* more frequently, with more than one each fall and spring semester. However, many of these letters were limited in scope, so I included only those that provided an annual-review and strategy format, approximately one per semester. Newcastle did not digitally archive their *Profile and Annual Review* for 2006–2007 or

2007–2008, before Vice-Chancellor's Chris Brink was installed in office, such that Newcastle was unable to produce print copies. Again, each university president or vice-chancellor gave a number of speeches, penned many letters or press-releases, but to keep the sample small enough for analysis yet large enough to provide an adequate swath of representation, approximately one such SLA per year was included from each school. Additionally, one strategic plan developed or presented during that same timespan was collected from those institutions which use them (n=5), resulting in a total of 58 documents for the analysis.

Document Sample

Fifty-three speeches, letters, and addresses (SLAs) given between 2006 and 2010 were collected from among the ten universities [Figure 2]. This timespan was selected to allow for a binary comparison to investigate how the worldwide economic collapse which occurred in 2007–2008 was reflected in the official narrative. Thus, I attempted to bookend the documents based on the summer of 2008 in order to provide some balance of speeches before and after the advent and recognition of the great recession. On average, one SLA per year was sourced from university websites, publications, and the offices of leadership. Each of these reflected the style or intent of a formal state of the university address, which allowed me to exclude many of the other speeches, presentations, press releases, publications, and letters for which the president or vice-chancellor was responsible. Further, the sampled items are each public documents, readily available, and were presented to the entire university community in addition to the university's external constituency. Excluded were the many speeches to subsets of the university community (such as UT President William Powers' speech at the Houston

Livestock and Rodeo Show on March 20th, 2008). For institutions that gave a formal annual address such as a state of the university address or annual oration, each was included. For those universities that did not have formal SLAs with an obvious such title, their equivalent procedural message was included. In some cases, changes in leadership or the demands of specific institutional needs caused some institutional sets to be incomplete while others had more than one SLA per year. The collection timespan is loosely defined as 2006–2010, nominally a five-year span. However, some SLA's were delivered during the 2005–2006 academic year, and others in the 2010–2011 academic year. For instance, Newcastle's 2011 Profile and Annual Review was published in November 2010, reflecting on the prior academic year (2009–2010). Due to the institutional variance in how each SLA is delivered it was impossible to collect a uniform sample of SLAs, but the combined set is representative of SLAs for the whole.

Five strategic plans were sourced for the data set. MIT, Princeton, and Cambridge do not produce university strategic plans. UT created a commission report on the 125th anniversary of the school's founding containing history and intended future direction, but I chose not to include it as it fundamentally differed from other strategic plans. Harvard published a strategic plan in 2006, but it was limited to faculty development. Further, individual colleges and departments at Harvard, UT, Princeton, Cambridge, and MIT produced strategic plans, but none of these were intended to be institutional plans. The final set includes plans from Oxford (2008), Leeds (2009), Nebraska (2008), Newcastle (2010), and Stony Brook (2010).

Analysis

Following Slaughter (1993), each document was read to identify narrative themes. Institutional leaders speak about more than status, and even when talking about status their language is not necessarily couched in terms *of* status. This analysis was conducted in two distinct phases. For the first step, I constrained the analysis to statements that speak to the world-class nature of the institution. Identification of these statements was guided by Salmi's (2009) features common to world-class institutions, targeting the presidents' and vice-chancellors' use of terminology to represent institutional status. Prior research identifies the features of world-class universities: abundant resources, favorable governance, and concentration of talent (Salmi, 2009). Using these three guideposts, each document was read to identify statements referencing any of the three status indicators. Each identified statement was then coded with the appropriate theme, or with multiple themes as many statements addressed more than one indicator of status. Phase one of this project does not assume to be all encompassing regarding thematic guidelines. It focuses only on the three factors of a world-class institution as the guiding categories for thematic development, and aims to test the discourse within the aforementioned guidelines of defining world class institutions. The process of reading the documents revealed that other themes were present beyond these constraints on world-class status, and phase two of the analysis, explained in a later section, explores the broad themes free of these constraints.

Phase One—Categorical Analysis of Status Statements

For the first phase of analysis, each document was read for content and individual excerpts were identified and deductively coded using the factors for "world-class" institutions laid forth by Salmi (2009). This deductive analysis generated excerpts for each of the various factors: each instance of the institutional leader referring to the institution in a manner that reflected *abundance of resources*: "MIT's success in attracting research funding provides an important measure of the quality, ambition and accomplishment of our faculty, staff and students" (MIT, 2010); *concentration of talent*: "The University continues to attract some of the best "Masters and Scholars" in the world, but its composition has changed and broadened, and its capacity and identity have evolved along with its composition" (Cambridge, 2008); or *favorable governance*: "The best way to support research in Texas is the Research University Development Fund, which the Legislature created in 2007" (UT, 2010). Each statement was excerpted and identified in the coding scheme.

This process generated 1,276 individual excerpts. It was possible to code a statement with more than one of these indicators. For instance, the previous excerpt from the University of Texas illustrates how a statement may represent both favorable governance ("…which the Legislature created in 2007…") due to its reliance on the relationship between the university and, in this case, the state legislature, and abundance of resources (…research support from the "Research University Development Fund"), as that relationship university-state relationship resulted in increased funds beneficial to the university. This kind of overlap resulted in those 1,276 excerpts being identified with 1,476 code-applications, with specific breakdowns as illustrated in figure 3.

These excerpts were then axially coded to identify subcategories within each parent category in order to provide greater understanding of the parent categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). These subcategories were created holistically from the document, to determine the manner in which leadership talked about the individual parent categories. Within the open-coding (parent) categories, the axial subcategories developed were: (Abundant Resources) Alumni, Building/Construction/Facilities, and Funding/Grants/Money; (Favorable Governance) Institutional Governance, Local/State Governance, and National/Regional Governance; and, (Concentration of Talent) Administration/Staff, Faculty, Graduate Students, Undergraduates, and Awards. These coded excerpts were then used to identify common themes in order to develop narratives of institutional status in a world-class context. These narratives are generated to reflect the common themes within the documents.

Further analysis involves another level of categorization. In order to gather the actual content of the excerpts, it became clear that merely relying on the parent- and sub-categories did not sufficient reflect on what these leaders were saying. Analysis of the data revealed a difference in the *manner* or *motivation* behind individual statements. As such, I developed a binary category to overlay across all statements to capture this difference. For illustrative purposes, consider the following statements:

> A: We will continue to bring the most talented people to this university—by seeking out the most outstanding scholars in the world, and by opening our doors as wide as possible to students of exceptional ability and promise. Providing broad access to a Harvard education is an essential expression of our meritocratic values—and of our responsibility to the nation and the world. (Harvard, 2009)

> B: I will never forget the experience of visiting a hospital in Botswana where a Harvard team, led by Professor Max Essex, has devised a drug regimen that is

curtailing the transmission of HIV- AIDS from breastfeeding mothers to their infants. (Harvard, 2010)

Each statement comes from the same school (Harvard), addresses the concentration of talent at the institution, and identifies faculty as a component of this concentration of talent. However, the dominant difference between the two statements is that statement *A* is a description of the aspirations of the institution, while statement *B* is a description of the accomplishments of the institution. Each statement works to promote the status of the university, but do so in a different manner. Statements that make claims as to the future accomplishments or the direction of the university, but lack concrete evidence of that movement being underway, seem to be inherently different from those statements that contain concrete, measurable accomplishments. The former speak to the future, the direction of the institution. The latter speak to the current status, and are founded in past (and current) activities.

For the purpose of this study, I have labeled statements as either (A) *intentional* status statements, or (B) *validating* status statements. Each of these terms emerged from the coding samples, as the content represented one of two evident types of speech, and I use them here to reflect these differences. Intentional statements reveal the university's plans, intentions, and goals—targets the university may or may not accomplish, but which serve to motivate and promote the institution. Validating statements also serve to motivate and promote the institution, but do so through identify concrete accomplishments or plans thoroughly underway, such that their references is to existent efforts and achievements, rather than potential efforts and achievements. Measuring differentiation between the potentiality of aspirational statements and the actuality of validating statements provides the analysis with greater precision in investigating how university leaders discuss status before and after the recession.

Phase Two—Official Institutional Narratives

Just as the categorical analysis addresses the manner in which university presidents and vice-chancellors discuss the status of their institutions, phase two of this analysis recognizes the limitations of defining the narrative in such narrow terms. Continued and repetitive attention to the various documents revealed further broad institutional narratives which address some of the driving research questions in ways that are not captured by the analysis conducted in phase one. Again, following Slaughter (1993), each document was read for content. However, rather than categorizing individual statements within the constraints of Salmi's (2009) definitive activities of world-class institutions, or following some pre-determined framework for analysis, this reading was done to identify broad thematic concepts and common narratives present in the documents without the theoretical constraints present in phase one. Individual SLAs were read and two dominant themes were identified. These themes were developed holistically, rather than through the presupposition of some overarching content structure. Thus, the narratives revealed in phase two speak to the broad commonalities in the official discourse present in the field of higher education at world class research universities. Once each narrative was identified, their status and content were compared within the context of the research questions.

Limitations

This study is not intended to completely capture the public discourse at world-class research institutions, as that would require far greater sampling from potential sources of official university discourse. This could presumably be extended beyond those attributable to the president or vice-chancellor, at each arguably world-class university within the study's time frame. The constraints of this study (one document per year, for a period of five years) would, when extended at that range, generate an insurmountable collection of SLAs. If an attempt to rationally limit to only 100 world class institutions (25% of the Times' list of world-class universities, and 20% of the ARWU list), only one document per year would generate a database of 500 documents, and that would poorly represent the entire body of public discourse at those institutions. In short, the availability of potential inclusions in the sample is too great to manage effectively and this sample is purposefully intended to provide only an initial foray into the subject.

While this sample of documents is intended to represent the broad field of research-intensive, world-class higher education, it is an impossible assumption to claim that it is indeed representative of the entire field. The six universities in the U.S. sample, while members of the Association of American Universities, only comprise a fraction of the association's membership. Less than 10% of the public universities in the association and just over 10% of the private universities in the association are represented. Further, neither of the Canadian institutions are represented. Within the Russell Group, only 4% of the 26 universities are represented. Further, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings identifies 400 universities as world-class institutions, and the Shanghai Jiao-Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities identifies the top 500 universities. In either case, this sample less than 3% of the world universities, and far less than all universities worldwide.

As a purposeful sample, this data set excludes a number of available sources of discourse from several of the included institutions. For instance, the MIT inclusion comprises nine documents, from an available 19 such letters, and none of the 26 formal speeches on different topics given during President Hockfield's tenure within the timeframe. Each president and vice-chancellor has a similar catalog of public remarks, and a potentially-larger catalog of internal, private, institutional remarks that may act to further define the institutional mission, status, values, or endeavors. This sample cannot possibly comprise the entire body of public discourse at these institutions. Added to this limitation of the institutional catalog is the fact that the institutions sampled represent only a fraction of the major western research universities, and an even smaller percentage of 'world class' institutions as measured through the various ranking systems. Thus, while the sampled discourse is intended to be representative of U.S. and U.K. world-class research university, this representation is not truly extensible to the extant discourse in the field of higher education.

Another limitation is that the elite university group, intended to represent the absolute upper echelon of higher education, includes five schools regularly included in the various top-10 lists of higher education institutions. Each of these institutions has a sizable endowment, with the U.S. universities' individual endowments dwarfing that of entire systems in other environments. Further, the U.S. universities are all private, while their aspirational counterparts are all public universities. In the United Kingdom, Cambridge and Oxford are far greater endowed than Leeds and Newcastle, albeit to less of a degree. The elite schools are far older on average, with the youngest (MIT-1861) several decades older than the oldest in the aspirational group (Leeds-1887). Variance in age, size of endowment, of student body, governance structure, and many other features of the individual institutions may illustrate that the comparative nature of this study is focused on entirely different types of entity. However, this limitation, I believe, serves to illustrate that the field of higher education in fact disparate and non-uniform such that 'field' may need to be further delineated for any future comparative study.

Finally, as this data set is limited to public speeches and letters, as well as the rare institutional strategic plan, it says nothing about the actual activities the university is pursuing. For further analysis, future research might mitigate this limitation by contending with the content of financial reports and budgets, institutional agenda, or other relics representative of the activities taking place. This study focuses solely on the publicly reported narrative, rather than the actions that entail at the university.

Chapter 4: Findings, Phase One—Categorical Analysis of Status Statements

This chapter reveals the official narratives on institutional status provided by formal university leaders through analysis at multiple levels: descriptive analysis, categorical analysis, and investigative analysis. It starts with basic *descriptive analysis* of the documents being considered to illustrate differentiation of texts at the primary level, as even state of the university addresses have wide variety in demeanor, construction, and voice. This is followed by a *categorical analysis* of excerpt demographics. For this section, the various parent categories set forth by Salmi (2009) are used to quantify the status-content of the SLAs in order to reveal broad trends in the narratives. This is further refined into a *refined categorical analysis* by utilizing axial sub-codes as substitutes for the parent categories, in order to more finely parse the content of the various sources. These sub-codes emerged from the data, to further define what was taking place within the primary parent categories. Finally, in the investigative section I develop an *aspirational analysis* using my aspirational/validating framework over the primary demographics to investigate motivational forces and nuance within the statements of institutional leaders. Analysis based on the axial coding will illustrate further trends within the broad categorical demographics. Using the two demographic approaches reveals the basic narratives of institutional status at research universities. These basic narratives illustrate the contrasts before and after the recession, between universities of differing tiers, and between universities in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Descriptive analysis

This section reveals differences among each institution's overall approach to the documents used in this project. Each university will be taken individually, to illustrate the structure and design of the documents, and to provide context to the later analysis. The order of universities in this section is split first by nation, with the United Kingdom followed by the United States. Within each national set, the universities are grouped by status tier, and then in alphabetical order. Ordering the universities by nation and tier are intended to provide ease of analysis along the research-question lines. Within the individual nation-tier set, ordering alphabetically is merely a matter of convenience.

Cambridge

The Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge delivers an *Annual Address to the Regent House*, the official electoral governing body consisting of over 3,800 members. Dame Alison Richard served as Vice-Chancellor from 2003–2010, delivering each of the addresses from 2006–2009. Sir Leszek Borysiewicz took the office in October, 2010, delivering the ultimate address from Cambridge in the data set. Each address is titled with an endearing, motivational moniker that acts as the guidepost for the document. In *The Well-Educated Undergraduate* (Cambridge, 2006), Richard discusses how Cambridge uniquely commits to a quality undergraduate experience at a research-intensive institution. In *The Distant Fen: Cambridge in the World* (Cambridge, 2007), she contrasts the university's once distant proximity to the ruling elite of London in the middle ages to its present role as a world-leader in research and education in a shrinking world. In *Masters and Scholars: Cambridge, Community, and the Evolving Role of Former Students* (Cambridge, 2008), the focus is on the rising importance of alumni in an increasingly competitive environment. *Deliberate Diversity: Cambridge and the UK Higher Education* System (Cambridge, 2009) explores the role of Cambridge in a diverse system of universities, and expands its role in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body, to argue that Cambridge could not exist without the rest of the universities in the system, and that due to its unique nature it must serve more than the United Kingdom and recruit and compete on a world scale. Sir Leszek Borysiewicz delivered his inaugural address to the Regent House, entitled *Shared Values and Visions* (Cambridge 2010), in which he acknowledges the trouble in the economy, the changes in the U.K. higher education system, and identifies how his administration interprets the mission of the university.

Each document is approximately 3,000 words, with the overall content dedicated to whatever theme is embodied by the title, including the noted accomplishments and intended plans for the university. Beyond those titular themes, though, each has a similar structure that involves recognition of past accomplishments and a dedication to overcome impending challenges. Further, each Vice-Chancellor uses their time before Regent House to illustrate their vision for the university, and to laud the unique nature of the institution in both British higher education and in the world.

A discussion with the office of the Vice-Chancellor revealed that Cambridge does not generate a strategic plan.

Oxford

The Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University presents an annual *Oration*, which is delivered to the members of Communion, the university's governing body. Dr. John Hood served as Vice-Chancellor 2004–2009, with Dr. Andrew Hamilton taking the position on October 6th, 2009. Three of the orations in the data set were delivered by Dr. Hood (2006, 2007, and 2008), and two (2009, 2010) were delivered by Dr. Hamilton. After the oration, the speeches are published in the *Oxford University Gazette*, the official journal for the university, as was the university's strategic plan. Each of Dr. Hood's orations were above 8,000 words, while Dr. Hamilton's two orations were less than 6,000, combined. Dr. Hamilton's first oration was short, at 1,800 words, but focused on the future and acted as a welcoming statement in his new role.

The orations follow a common format: they start with an opening, praising the history and unique nature of Oxford as an institution of higher learning, usually coupled with a message of some kind to drive the theme of the speech; then, the Vice-Chancellor recognizes the achievements of and developments at the university, where the bulk of the excerpts are found; subsequently, the Vice-Chancellor discusses issues of governance at the university; finally, the oration is closed with acknowledgement of the new additions to the university and those that have left, either through retirement or death.

Oxford's strategic plan was developed by a steering committee, chaired by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and populated by members of the Oxford Council, the university divisions and colleges, and further groups for deeper study and recommendation. It is unclear how many individuals were involved in the writing of the strategic plan. The primary document is submitted to the collegiate university for comment, commented on, drafted, and then ultimately proposed to Congregation where the document was discussed. Then a reworked document was created to address the final concerns raised in Congregation and ultimately submitted to the Oxford Council for approval. The version approved by council was then recommend to Congregation for final approval, ending a complex process that provides a new document every five years, and may allow for updates and revisions every three years.

The 2008 strategic plan, however, is unique among the set of strategic plans. At over 16,000 words, it is the longest document in the entire collection from all universities, more than twice the length of the next-longest strategic plan or document. Whereas other strategic plans are iconic, far-reaching documents that lay out grand plans and aspirations, Oxford's is a business document, that only recently had "been relabeled the Strategic Plan" (Oxford, 2008a). Rather than a clarion call for excellence, the Oxford strategic plan is a corporate plan set forth to specifically identify strategies and governance structures to fulfill the university's mission. While the plan is laced with language that calls for academic excellence, distinction, and recognizes Oxford's preeminent position nationally and internationally, it is not a motivational piece. There is some motivational language, but the bulk of the document is prescriptive in describing the activities that should take place and the relationships between components of the university. Further, from a format perspective, the plan is structured like a legal brief, with a three-part introduction and nine enumerated chapters, each with numbered paragraphs and subparagraphs, providing a framework for citation. For instance, chapter V, section C, (Paragraph 104) is dedicated to the university's commitment to increasing financial aid for undergraduates from the UK, and discusses the "Oxford Opportunity Bursary Scheme", that its impact on other financial aid programs is to be "reviewed and developed", that its impact "on the composition of the student population will be closely monitored", and may ultimately be modified if necessary (Oxford (SP[1]), 2008b, p. 21). The document is not meant for public consumption, nor as a metaphorical or idealized push for greatness. Oxford is successful, and the strategic plan reflects this, such that the university need only articulate how it will improve what it does, and how it will continue its success in the future. Further, as the only representation of a strategic plan in the set from an elite institution, it is notable that it is completely unlike the other strategic plans set forth by the universities striving to be more like Oxford.

Leeds

At the University of Leeds, the Vice-Chancellor Michael Arthur did not give an annual address. For the years ending 2006 and 2007, he penned a brief forward to the university's annual reports, each approximately 500 words, which selected accomplishments and plans for the future. From 2008 onward, the annual report changed format, and while the Vice-Chancellor still wrote a forward, the entire document is designed like a state of the university address. Each annual report is published by the university with full graphics, figures, and graphs, and is printed on glossy publication stock. The annual reports for 2008, 2009, and 2010 are each approximately 3,000 words, with dedications, accomplishments, plans, and an overview of the university's financial reports.

[1] For ease of identification, I use the notation (SP) to identify strategic plans in citations. All other references from the presidents and vice-chancellors are from speeches, letters, and addresses.

The 2009 strategic plan was published in a similar manner, with full color artwork, evocative photography, and is of approximately twice the length as the annual reports, with 6,605 words. While the plan is an institutional document, its presentation and publication method (color, size, marketing attention) illustrates that it was intended for a broader audience. The strategy acts as the university's official promotional document to HEFCE, justifying the university's position and accomplishment in an increasingly challenging funding environment. Leeds' strategy was developed through a collaborative process, which they claim was the first use of such a process in the United Kingdom.

> The strategy was developed through a consultation process which engaged all our staff and students right across the organisation, in all areas, at all levels and in every way possible. (Leeds (SP), 2009b)

The plan includes far less specific instruction than the plan provided by Oxford, but mirrors the format and content of the other plans in the data set. It opens with a forward by the Vice-Chancellor much like the individual forwards to the various annual reports. This is followed by sections briefly identifying and acknowledging the university's accomplishments, identifying performance objectives and the direction of the university—which they call the university's key themes—and pinpointing *strategic enablers* intended to empower the university to achieve success. Leeds focuses their future on four key themes on which the university intends to focus activity:

> Enhance our standing as an international university;
>
> Achieve an influential world-leading research profile;

Inspire our students to develop their full potential; and,

Increase our impact on a local to global scale (Leeds (SP), 2009b)

Each theme is articulated to include broad activities intended to achieve the theme-goals, such as “recruit and support high quality students from all backgrounds” (Leeds (SP), 2009b), justified within a paragraph explain the strategy, philosophy, and procedure intended to accomplish that specific goal.

Newcastle

Professor Chris Brink became the Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle in October 2007. His inaugural address was predominantly an acceptance speech with special consideration to his educational philosophy. The university did not have records of annual speeches, and could not provide copies of their annual reports from the period prior to his installment as Vice Chancellor. This may be due to the new Vice-Chancellor instilling a new policy at Newcastle, or it could be accidental. The Vice-Chancellor’s office did not provide documents from any of the prior administrations, and does not archive any such documents or records online.

As such, the Newcastle collection includes the only the subsequent *Profile and Annual Review* for each of the 2008–2010 academic years. These reports are published in retrospect, with the report for the 2008 academic year published in 2009. The reports are approximately 6,000 words each, with the first 500 or so committed to the Vice-Chancellor’s forward, and the rest of the report dedicated to specific endeavors and accomplishments. As the focus of the report is a review of the previous year, the tenor of the reports is of unbridled optimism and pride, with each page singling out some student or professor, business endeavor, new construction, or research accomplishment to illustrate the competitive, growing success of the university. Much of the praise is for projects in process, and the documents take care to highlight great diversity in the interesting work taking place at the university.

This is a tactic present in the strategic plan, called *Newcastle University Vision 2021—A World-class Civic University: Excellence with a Purpose.* The plan is shorter than the annual report, at about 3,300 words, and its optimism, structure, scope, and aspirations mirror the longer annual reports, identifying broad goals that span many disciplinary fields. The report is produced through a collaborative process led by the Chair of the University Council and Pro-Chancellor Mark I'Anson, collecting "the plans of individual units, which collectively describe how we aim to realise our vision and mission" (Leeds, 2012). *Vision 2021* begins with a forward, from I'Anson, and is followed by an articulation of the university Vision and Mission, from Vice-Chancellor Chris Brink:

> Our vision is of Newcastle as a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence…we are acting out our mission statement, which is: to be a world-class research-intensive university; to deliver teaching and facilitate learning of the highest quality; to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England (Newcastle (SP), 2012)

The plan then identifies principles and values that support the vision and mission, provides a brief history of the university as a world-class civic university, and then articulates the individual goals and core functions, the university strategy. Like Leeds, Newcastle identifies specific areas of focus, called *societal challenge themes*, where

Newcastle has a strategic advantage and which can serve the people of North East England.

Harvard

President Lawrence Summers submitted a letter to the Harvard community on February 21st, 2006, stating his intention to resign his position. His letter, the first in the collection from Harvard, cited a rift between his office and members of the Arts and Science faculty, but includes a catalog of the accomplishments of the university. Derek Bok was appointed as interim president, returning to the office after spending 20 years as president from 1971–1991. He presented a letter to the members of the board of overseers—a report for the 2006–2007 academic year—which addressed a few issues he believed were necessary to pursue even though the new president had not yet taken office. Again, the document identified accomplishments, addressed the direction of the university, and spoke to purpose of the institution. President Bok was succeeded by Dr. Drew Faust, who has served Harvard as president since 2007. President Faust's addresses to the Harvard community include four speeches, from 2007–2010, although three are labeled as letters to the community. President Faust's 2007 inaugural address was delivered to "thousands of members of the Harvard faculty, staff, students, alumni and the community" (Harvard University, 2007). In 2009, President Faust reverted from writing a letter to the community and gave her annual address as an actual speech in front of an audience, delivered September 24th at Harvard's Sanders Theater to a ticketed audience which was promoted through Harvard magazine and webcast live for interested parties outside of Boston (Harvard Magazine, 2009).

Each of President Faust’s annual addresses follows a similar format, with an opening welcome to the new members of the Harvard community, followed by recognition of activities and successes from the past year. Then, she addresses the future of the university, identifying plans underway, endeavors being considered and promoted, and identification of new faculty and administrators in their new positions. The various iterations of the Harvard addresses each identify only a few grand accomplishments, but are subtle and nuanced in their accolades. Accomplishments are diverse, and usually the recognition is reserved for either the most noteworthy, including the 2009 Nobel Prize for medicine, or the broadest in intended impact, such as the expansion to create a campus in Allston. The documents from Harvard varied in size from 1,311 words (Harvard, 2006: on Summers’ resignation) to 8,524 (Harvard, 2007a: Bok’s sole address), with President Faust’s addresses either around 1,800 words (Harvard 2007b, 2010), or 3,300 words (Harvard, 2008, 2009).

MIT

President Susan Hockfield served from 2005–2012, and delivered several letters to the MIT community, usually through electronic media. These letters were given on average twice per academic year. However, only one message to the community was given during the 2007–2008 year, while four such speeches were given during the 2008–2009 academic year, in October, November, February, and again in May. The messages from November 2008, and February 2009 were each dedicated to the university’s financial position.

The MIT messages are brief, 1,442 word on average. Most of the letters serve to support the university’s ambitions, the current state of affairs, and act as a welcome to the university for new members of the community. Accomplishments are selected carefully, as the medium for delivery limits the room available to other university presidents. The letters are uniformly optimistic, including when addressing the economic downturn during the financial updates, as she illustrates that while the university has lost a sizable percentage of the endowment in the economic recession, the university's fiscal managers and budgetary plans have been successful in minimizing the impact. While not alone in addressing the fiscal issues in this manner, President Hockfield provided the sole dedicated memo to the university on finances.

Princeton

President Shirley Tilghman gives an annual address at the fall opening exercises. The exercises are attended by new students, members of the Princeton governing body, faculty, and members of the community. The *Opening Exercises Greeting and Address* is usually less than 3,000 words, and always includes some notable recommendation to the new members of the Princeton community, including a David Letterman-style top-ten list for new students. As with the Harvard and MIT addresses, accomplishments are carefully selected for their impact and motivating power, usually with one or two powerful examples rather than a litany of institutional accomplishments. This is followed by recommendations for the following year, and provides an overview of the intended direction for the university. President Tilghman is a personable speaker, and her style is constant throughout all five speeches, usually ending with “Welcome to Princeton” (Princeton, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010).

Nebraska

Dr. Harvey Perlman has served as Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln since July, 2000. His formal State of the University Address is usually given in the fall, during the first weeks of school. Each speech is designed to recognize the accomplishments of the prior year and is the vehicle for defining expectations for the coming academic year. Each speech is about 5,000 words. After welcoming and introductory remarks, he usually proceeds to address strategies for the year, provides a section looking back on institutional successes followed by one looking forward with intended events and goals. Each document has issues relevant to undergraduate education, specifically citing how the university intends to serve that population. While other research universities address undergraduates in these speeches, Nebraska is distinctive among this collection of universities in the depth to which they consider the role of attention to undergraduate students. After the financial crisis, each of the speeches included greater attention to budgetary issues.

The 2008 revision of the university's Strategic Plan, which they call a *Strategic Compass,* is shorter than the annual addresses, at just over 4,600 words, with over 2,000 words dedicated to two appendices on the history of strategic planning at the university and the Board of Regent's framework for accountability. Due to its brevity, the plan is broad in its scope, laying out the university vision, mission, and institutional values. This is followed by brief attention to institutional priorities (undergraduate education and research), and then provides general strategies for success, through resource-maximization such as "continually assess and demonstrate the importance of the university to the future success of our two most important funding sources: students and

Nebraska taxpayers" (Nebraska (SP), 2008b, p. 4) and "continue to be alert to entrepreneurial opportunities to enhance the research base of the university" (p. 5) and resource-reinvestment strategies. The plan was developed under the collaborative philosophy that the best "strategic plans emanate from units, departments and colleges, are the product of faculty deliberations, and are revised or confirmed through conversations with the campus administration" (Nebraska (SP), 2008b, p. 1). Colleges and departments presented reports in hearings to administration, the faculty senate, and several committees, which illustrated their individual strategic needs and ideas. The process continued through the collation, by committee, of common themes and the collaborative process continued through several phases until the final report was completed.

Stony Brook

Shirley Strum Kennedy served Stony Brook as president from 1994–2009, providing three *State of the University Addresses* at the end of each September, 2006–2008. Samuel L. Stanley, Jr. succeeded Kennedy as president in 2009, and his speeches from 2009 and 2010 conclude the set from Stony Brook. Both presidents delivered their addresses at the university's Convocation ceremony, welcoming a crowd of new and returning students, faculty, and staff. Their speeches are iconic of what would be expected of a state of the university address, with a welcoming greeting, and introduction to new faculty and staff, identification of student and faculty honors and accomplishments, coupled with administrative achievements, and a discourse on the financial status of the university. They lay out expectations and grand plans for the coming academic year, highlighting efforts that have been under way and are expected to come to fruition. Ultimately, they are encouraging in times of difficulty, and cheerleaders for the institutions accolades. Their Addresses are packaged by the university and published in a professional manner, with glossy covers, full color art, and magazine-style layouts, much like what is found at Leeds and Newcastle.

The strategic plan for 2010 and beyond is, like Newcastle's *Vision 2021*, a clean, promotional document that highlights the broad successes and intended direction of the university system. The second longest of the strategic plans, it is just under 7,000 words. However, unlike the plans for Nebraska, Oxford, Leeds, or Newcastle, this plan is a system-wide plan for the State University system for New York. As such, while it highlights the work done at Stony Brook, it does so without actually identifying Stony Brook University directly. Instead, it is intended to illustrate the future of the SUNY system rather than just the one university included in this sample. It is included in the data set as an example of broad institutional planning, even though it is not a university-specific document. Stony Brook has undergone a strategic planning process in the interim, producing a plan in 2013, but it is not included.

Like all of the strategic plans collected, the SUNY plan was a collaborative effort with input from all the institutional stakeholders. However, as a system-wide plan, it is unclear as to the depth of input from any individual department and rather presents a vision for the unified university system as opposed to the needs of individual groups within individual academic communities. The strategic plan includes broad goals that mirror the mission and goals described in the Stony Brook addresses. It focuses on SUNY's core values: Student-centeredness, community engagement, diversity, integrity, and collaboration. Each of these values is reminiscent of themes discussed in the Stony Brook addresses.

Again, Stony Brook University is not specifically featured or identified in the strategic plan. In fact, no single university from among the 64-campus system is identified. The only location-specific citation in the strategic plan refers to New York's status as "one of only ten states with a major Department of Energy laboratory—Brookhaven National Laboratory" (SUNY (SP), 2010). Stony Brook is responsible for the management of Brookhaven, and mentions this collaboration and the ensuing research opportunities for Stony Brook students in every annual address.

Texas

The University of Texas at Austin is the only member of the Association of American Universities in the Texas system. William C. Powers, Jr., took office as President of the university in February 2006. His annual State of the University Address is usually given in mid-to-late September, in front of an audience that includes the Chairman and members of the Board of Regents, the Chancellor of the UT system, faculty, students, and staff. Each speech is approximately 4,000 words, and they invariably focus on the events surrounding the 125th anniversary of the UT system in 2008—those speeches before the anniversary look forward to it, while those after the celebration revel in its memory. President Powers focuses on the next 125 years in each speech, continually recognizing the accomplishments thus far and the horizons the university seeks.

Categorical Analysis

Categorical analysis, in this section, uses Salmi's (2009) components of world-class status as categories for analysis. Each of these categories is identified as a component common to world-class universities. Thus, while they may in fact represent the activities necessary to illustrate world-class activity, they are not the only way of measuring status. This section investigates only how frequently Salmi's categories occur in the content of the various documents, providing demographics of the field. This demographic analysis of the application of parent-categories reveals broad trends in the narratives, as well as informing the structure of the documents. I identified each statement in the document that spoke to the concept of institutional status, using Salmi's (2009) definitional categories, *abundance of resources*, *favorable governance*, and *concentration of talent*. This produced 1,414 excerpts. The 58 documents consisted of 227,863 words, with the 1,414 excerpts comprising approximately half of the collected document's content (44%) with 100,813 words. On average, the documents were around 4,000 words each, ranging from less than 500 in the forward to the 2006–2007 Leeds Annual Report, to almost 17,000 in the Oxford strategic plan [Figure 4].

While there is some differentiation between data sources, this analysis focuses on the combined totals for all code-applications regardless of whether the source was a SLA or a Strategic Plan. While strategic plans may seem to be designed to meet a difference audience and purpose, upon reading each document it became clear that the structure and style was concurrent with the various annual addresses. The strategic plans at Leeds and Newcastle almost perfectly mimic the annual reports in style and substance, as well as publication style. The strategic plan at Nebraska, while constructed by committee, mirrors the overarching mission-interpretation present in the annual addresses by the Chancellor. Each of these three strategic plans seems to be aimed at both internal and external constituencies, and provide another measure of public discourse on the status of the institution. While the SUNY Strategic Plan varies in scope, as it speaks to the mission of the university system rather than the role of Stony Brook itself, the subject matter and criteria in the document are mimicked in each of Stony Brook's addresses. These four strategic plans illustrate that while they may intend to be different documents, they may be treated as parent-documents to the ensuing speeches. Strategic plans specify the 'current' interpretation of the institutional mission and goals. Those institutional missions and goals are then elucidated in greater detail in the individual addresses and annual reports, with institution- and context-relevant specifics. Including the individual plans from Leeds, Nebraska, and Newcastle with the system plan for Stony Brook was a near-complete representation of the set. While the Oxford plan identified the institutional missions and goals, it was uniquely a business document with far greater specificity than any other document in the set. However, as a potential outlier, I reasoned it was more appropriate to include it with the rest of the documents rather than try to develop another group for analysis.

Each excerpt is identified with the type of content mentioned in the statement, allowing for an analysis of commonality. However, some statements addressed more than one topic, so the 1,414 excerpts are identified with 1,629 individual code applications in the three primary categories. Abundance of resources represented 36% (n=580) of the statements, favorable governance represented 29% (n=478) of the statements, and concentration of talent represented 35% (n=571) of the statements [Figure 5]. This reveals that throughout the various documents, institutional leaders approached the three primary status topics relatively equally, devoting approximately a third of their status statements to each of Salmi's (2009) parent-categories, while leaning more towards discussions of resources and talent. There is no claim that the three categories of world-class activities are meant to be in balance, only that there *are* three categories of activity. One might suppose that given three categories the balance would be equal, but just as many institutional missions consists of research, education, and outreach, it is not claimed that those three activities must exist in perfect symmetry. Thus, the revelation that the three categorical activities are nearly in balance is the basis for further comparisons.

When considering the temporal distribution of the various categorical statements, before and after the advent of the recession, abundant resources shifted from 35% (n=239) to 36% (n=341). Favorable governance decreased from 31% (n=215) to 28% (n=263). Statements on the concentration of talent at the institution rose slightly from 34% (n=236) to 36% (n=335). Thus, it seems that from a categorical standpoint, the advent of the recession was not followed by a pertinent shift in the discourse.

Geographic differences reveal that universities in the United Kingdom were somewhat more likely to discuss abundant resources (33%, n=238) than those in the U.S. (29%, n=332). Favorable governance was roughly equal between the United Kingdom (25%, n=187) and the United States (26%, n=291). Concentration of Talent was more popular in the United States (32%, n=366) than in the United Kingdom (27%, n=205). Finally, comparing institutional status provided differentiation as well.

Abundance of resources was more common in elite universities (38%, n=244) than in the aspirational universities (34%, n=336). Issues of favorable governance were reversed, with elite universities focusing only 27% (n=175) of their status statements on the topic, while the aspirational group did so 31% (n=303) of the time. Aspirational universities also exceeded their elite counterparts in recognition of the concentration of talent, with 36% (n=352) of their status statements, compared to 34% (n=219) of elite statements of status.

As all of these numbers generally hover around the 1/3rd mark, differences between nations, tiers, and following the recession are mild at best. Thus, further analysis within each parent category reveals a great deal of discrepancy among what component of status is being addressed. The following sections will investigate in-category differences by identifying subcategories within Salmi's parent categories, for each of the various conditions.

Refined Categorical Analysis

Abundant Resources

The *abundant resources* category was intended to represent the prevalence of the university's primary sources of funding: government expenditures or support, competitive research funding, gifts and returns from the endowment, and tuition (Salmi, 2009). Those four subcategories did not entail with such clear divisions in the excerpts from this parent category. Thus, I extended the definition of *abundant resources* to reflect other components of what the presidents and vice-chancellors referred to as resources for the institution, identified through axial coding. Three primary subcategories surfaced within the greater parent category: *Alumni*, *Building/Construction/Facilities*, and *Funding/Grants/Money*.

Alumni commentary included specific considerations of their role through improved financial support, although this was usually an historical reference rather than a blatant call for future alumni to contribute or as part of an alumni-recruiting effort:

> The Alumni Fund had more donor participation and more dollars donated than ever before, with more than 33,300 alumni contributing almost $42 million. Three classes (1927, 1962 and 1972) set new reunion giving records and the Class of 2007 also set a new Senior Gift record (surpassing the record set by 2006) with 52% of the class participating. (MIT, 2007b)

None of the statements, nor any of the context, put alumni donations in the context of the greater institutional budget, instead focusing on the group as a more than just a financial resource. Alumni recognition worked to define the role of alumni as a resource to the university, and to recognize the later accomplishments as a measure of the institution's impact:

> Alumni play an active role in the life of the University in a number of ways. They provide careers advice through our new career mentoring service and share entrepreneurial expertise as mentors and non-executive directors of our spinout companies. We have graduates in most countries across the world and they are able to offer advice and support to prospective students in their home countries. (Leeds, 2008)

> …Jeff Bezos, Class of 1986, who invented an entirely new way to conduct commerce by founding Amazon.com… [his] contributions, and those of

> thousands like [him], justify the investment we—and you—are about to make in your education. (Princeton, 2006)

The role of alumni as a resource was commonly centered on increased engagement and further opportunity for students.

> Our new Alumni Association structure appears to be generating creative ways in which alumni can reengage with the university. Alumni involvement with us can lead to opportunities unavailable otherwise. (UNL, 2009)

University leaders also focused on the facilities available on campus, and were sure to highlight any new construction or projects to beautify or otherwise improve the physical plant of the university:

> So, in the year to come we will watch as Stefan Behnisch's science complex begins to emerge from what is now a cavernous hole in the ground into a state-of-the-art home for interdisciplinary work in stem cell science, bioengineering, and systems biology and a leading example of our commitment to sustainable design. (Harvard, 2008)

Finally, discussion of the financial status of the institution was a common theme, frequently referring to improvements in the endowment, donations or gifts, or the broad fiscal solvency of the university: In fact, of the identifiable sources of income specified in the excerpts (n=239), specified gifts and philanthropic income (n=89) were cited just as frequently as research and grant income (n=89). Philanthropy excerpts considered fundraising events, “Last year our annual gala in Manhattan brought in $3.2 million, an extraordinary number for any fundraising event” (Stony Brook, 2006), as well as directed gifts aimed at programs or centers: “The Institute for Computational Engineering and

Sciences will also be investing in new faculty and student talent through gifts from two generous donors totaling $24 million" (Texas, 2008), and "We have also gained some significant grants, such as the £6 million ($9 million) contributed by the Wellcome Trust towards the new Centre for Bacterial Cell Biology" (Newcastle, 2009).

Considerations of competitive and external research grants (n=89), usually referenced far greater levels of income than anything but the income from private-university endowments:

> Ten years ago we received $49 million in research grants; this past year we received $139 million. One can examine the activities of each of our academic colleges and find major initiatives that are addressing important state and national issues. (Nebraska, 2010).

> The growth is evident across the disciplinary spectrum, with the largest proportionate increase being in the humanities. In terms of sources of funding, the proportion of internationally sourced funding in the portfolio has been increasing steadily. That now stands at 18 per cent, around a third of which comes from the EU. (Oxford, 2008)

> This has been an outstanding year for research. We received $511 million in external research awards, up 26 percent in two years. We moved from third to second in the nation in federal funding for universities without medical schools, ahead of Berkeley and Illinois, and trailing only MIT. (Texas, 2008)

> The income received from research council awards puts Newcastle University among the top 10 higher education institutions in the UK. (Newcastle, 2011)

More commentary on income was directed at the production and security of university endowments (n=17) than was directed at income or issues of tuition (n=10), at least as far as tuition representing an abundance of resources. Endowment excerpts were unbalanced, with three comments coming from Stony Brook, and one from Texas. The rest (n=13) were from the elite universities: “This year's 22.1% endowment return will add further financial strength to our education and research priorities for both today's and tomorrow's scholars” (MIT, 2007). Many (n=12) endowment statements were from after the advent of the economic recession, resulting in those statements centering on the impact of the economic collapse on the university’s endowment return:

> …the endowment fell from nearly $37 billion to $26 billion in one year’s time. That’s an $11 billion drop—in a source we’ve come to rely on for more than a third of our annual income. (Harvard, 2009)

It is striking that such a statement would count as recognition of abundance of resources. However, universities in the United Kingdom and public universities in the U.S. lack such high-performing endowments. Thus, the fact that the elite U.S. schools even have endowments that can fall $11B in one year and remain solvent at all is representative of those institutions’ veritable wealth in endowment income. Further, due to the dependence of endowment income (from interest earnings rather than the capital itself) at these universities, the importance of the endowment’s performance is critical. Presidents of the elite U.S. institutions perhaps owed their constituencies more information on the institution’s financial well-being during the sampled timeframe and thus ensured it was addressed promptly, as is evidenced at Harvard:

> Historically, Harvard has discussed endowment results only after the fiscal year ends. But in the extraordinary circumstances of last year, it seemed essential that our whole community begin to face the implications of this very important reality. (Harvard, 2009)

Attention to the endowment at the expense of attention to research income further reflects the reality of academic finance during this timeframe. While endowment income dipping drastically due to the recession, research income was generally up. In the same address, Harvard reported an increase in sponsored research, “up around 7 percent” (Harvard, 2009) over the prior year. This activity was reported at all the U.S. research universities in the sample, such that the status quo was continued improvement in research funding. Thus, presidents and vice-chancellors recognized a continued trend in improved research funds, and those considerations could be taken for granted, or at least addressed as “a somewhat brighter picture” (Harvard, 2009) than the impact on the endowment. With research stable, and endowment income varying dramatically, it makes sense that the endowment-dependent universities would focus so strongly on that even though research-income remains a huge, important component of the institutional budget.

Generally, tuition comments refer to the competitive nature of the university tuition rate, even if it is a sensitive source of income:

> It is also a fact that tuition revenues are up, but because of a cap set by the Regents, the increase is significantly less than we had planned. No one enjoys raising tuition, but even with the recent increases, UT remains an extremely good value in American higher education. (Texas, 2009)

> I can report to you that we will not face major budgetary issues this year, in large part, because of our increased enrollment. (Nebraska, 2007)

More frequently, tuition commentary focused on affordability rather than as a source of income. Some of this may be explained by the growing concern of the cost of higher education, and the university's need to publicly attend to concerns about higher education's value. While each university gets a significant component of its operating budget from tuition, the complexity of higher education financing occludes the tuition-cost-value equation. In an environment of increasing regulation and concern for the rising cost of higher education, where the consumer is primarily exposed to only the tuition price, universities have a vested interest in defending their efforts to increase or improve affordability. Thus, presidents and vice-chancellors paid homage to trying to keep tuition low (at public and U.K. universities) or meeting the tuition needs of students through financial aid (at elite/private U.S. universities).

> [Among public AAU universities] Stony Brook ranks fourth for the lowest tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students. We are first on the list when it comes to the lowest out-of-state tuition for undergrads. (Stony Brook, 2010)

> Through a series of reforms over the past few years, families with incomes up to $60,000 are no longer expected to contribute to the cost of their children's undergraduate education. (Harvard, 2008)

Institutional attention to tuition as a source of income, or as a provision of abundant resources may not be captured by this analytical model. Salmi's (2009) constraints on the *abundant resources* category to represent the gross availability of funds for educational purposes is, perhaps, more attenuated to gross income or large-scale grant or donor reception. Each of these features—tuition, endowments, philanthropy, and external research funds are perhaps more accurately represented through the investigative model presented in chapter five.

These three subcategories of *abundant resources*—alumni, building/construction/facilities, and funding/grants/money—represented the content of the abundant resources excerpts, and illustrate the differences in how institutional leaders talk about the concept. Salmi's (2009) conceptualization of what makes an institution *world class* measured what made those institutions stand out amongst their peers. However, the specifics of what is counted as an *abundant resource* is, itself, unclear. This project's further conceptualization of subcategorizing into these three areas clarifies Salmi's (2009) categories. When institutional leaders talk about abundant resources they do not say "We have abundant resources". Instead, they refer to components of the institution that reflect on the institution's income, fiscal solvency and planning (funding/grants/money):

> Our budget plans for the next several years anticipate slow, steady financial improvement, and the current endowment performance aligns well with those plans. While the modest gains that we expect will not relieve the need to take the reductions now under way for this year and next, if the steady performance I have described here continues through to year's end, we will not require cuts beyond those we have budgeted. Going forward—and remembering how dire the global economic situation appeared just a year ago—our anticipated returns should offer a hard-earned sense of relief. (MIT, 2010);

The presidents and vice-chancellors promoted the university's physical plant, expansion plans, and the facilities available for use to the members of the institution and the public (buildings/construction/facilities): "Cambridge is among the most beautiful universities in the world, and experiencing that beauty is part of what it means to be at Cambridge" (Cambridge, 2007); "The Norman Hackerman Building had a topping out ceremony on September 1. This state-of-the-art science building is scheduled for occupancy in spring of 2011" (Texas, 2009); and, "Within months, we hope to break ground on the first science complex in Allston—a milestone in our larger efforts to shape new spaces hospitable to interdisciplinary collaboration" (Harvard, 2007).

Finally, in some cases the institutional leaders refer to their alumni as resources to further the mission of the institution:

> First, the build-up of recent efforts notwithstanding, we must push hard to engage and inform alumni. Memories of life as a student here are important to many of us, but for those who no longer live or work here, Collegiate Cambridge must also be brought to life as it is today: an institution living fully in the present, with its eyes on the future. To connect the past experiences of alumni with the present Cambridge, we must communicate more consistently and substantively than we have done in the past. (Cambridge, 2008)

Perhaps it is not surprising to learn that during the specific time period of the study (2006–2010), given the broader public context of the great recession, the dominant theme within the concept of *abundant resources* is a focus on financial matters with 56% (n=345) of all abundant resources statements: "Our net assets grew by 90 percent, from $58 million to $110 million. And this year we are already ahead of where we were last year in fundraising" (Stony Brook, 2006). Further examination of this strand of the discourse—that presidents and vice-chancellors intend to impose a "we are doing okay" reassurance is investigated in greater depth in the next chapter.

Yet what is surprising is that the commitment to financial matters did not change following the recession, with 18% of all subcategory status statements both before and after the recession. Universities in the United Kingdom were slightly more likely to address financial matters (58%, n=158) than U.S. institutions were (54%, n=187). Finally, elite institutions were about 10% more likely to comment on the institution's financial status (61%, n=158) than aspirational universities were (51%, n=187). Some of this is due to the dominance of MIT's financial statements in the semester letters, two of which (MIT 2008b and 2009a) are letters to the community on updates to the institute's financial status:

> As we reported in late September at the State of the Institute, MIT has the latitude to approach the current financial realities in a deliberate way, because of three recent significant advances: we begin from a balanced budget, we smooth our endowment payout to distribute the effects of market volatility over several years, and, across the Institute, we have carefully accumulated cash reserves that can buffer a tough economic period. (MIT, 2008b)

It should not be surprising that the discourse on finances is elite-institution heavy, as those universities had far great impact on their endowments due to the recession, and they *have* endowments of such magnitude that financial outlook is dependent upon continued attention to the endowment itself. Further, the elite institutions had far higher research income, such that there too was an increased level of attention to those financial indicators. Due to the nature of institutional finances at these ten universities, the difference in the discourse seems predictable.

As a component of the abundant resources category*, building, construction, and facilities* occupied 36% (n=224) of the total:

> Important new research facilities, including the new Physics Building and the renovated Whittier building and Keim Hall will help address some of our critical research space needs. The University of Nebraska system's work in developing the Holland Computing Center, combining the resources in both Lincoln and Omaha, gives our faculty access to large scale computing resources. (UNL, 2009)

With the recession there was a slight decline in this commentary, with the share of abundant resources references falling about 3%. This is the largest change in abundant resources, following the recession, illustrating again that recession was not followed by presidents and vice-chancellors altering their attentions. Universities in the United States were a trifle more likely to address building projects and facilities than were universities in the United Kingdom. Aspirational universities were about a third more likely to address building projects and the quality of their facilities than were elite institutions: "…we have invested £26 million in new buildings and equipment, part of a capital programme to be undertaken over the coming years totaling circa £300 million" (Leeds, 2006); "We demolished the Experimental Science Building, and will replace it with a new six- story "green" building featuring modern, technology-enabled classrooms and undergraduate teaching labs for neuroscience and chemistry" (Texas, 2008); and,

> Southampton provides a great location for faculty and students to immerse themselves in the very specific local ecological issues, both coastal and marine.

> Our School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences has just added the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science to tackle pressing threats to the marine ecosystem. (Stony Brook, 2008)

Recognition of *alumni* occurred least-frequently of all the abundant resource statements (8%, n=52): “We have many accomplished alumni who have made great contributions to society and who deeply appreciate their education in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. They are not only voices for, but also examples in support of, the value of education in these fields” (Cambridge, 2008) [Figures 6; 7]. Very little difference existed between universities of any status or due to the recession. However, the universities in the United Kingdom were about a third more likely to acknowledge the accomplishments and value-added nature of their alumni than were universities in the United States:

> They [alumni] are our ambassadors, talking and writing about us, opening doors, and encouraging prospective students to apply; they help create and reinforce the University’s many flourishing partnerships with the private sector, not-for-profit organisations, and institutions of government; and they are a great pool of experience and expertise. (Cambridge, 2008)

None of the statements, nor any of the context, put alumni donations in the context of the greater institutional budget, instead focusing on the group as a more than just a financial resource. These data illustrate that when a leader refers to *abundant resources*, while generally this may include other types of resources it is predominantly used to apply to the institution’s finances, at least for statements made within the timeframe studied. Further, the largest difference in this subcategory is, not surprisingly, due to institutional status as those elite universities are inherently wealthier than the aspirational universities and thus have greater abilities as far as financial matters are concerned.

Favorable Governance

The *favorable governance* "dimension concerns the overall regulatory framework, the competitive environment and the degree of academic and managerial autonomy that the university enjoys" (Salmi, 2009, p. 8). This proposition argues that *favorable governance* refers to the political environment in which the institution operates. However, upon dissection of the types of statements leaders make, this is not the case [Figures 8; 9]. Fully 81% (n=401) of the statements made to represent activities of governance, activities undertaken by or performed under the guidance of administration of the university, state and local entities, and national and regional governing bodies reflect on the individual actions of the university itself. I have called this subgroup *institutional management*, but it may just as easily be described as self-congratulatory recognition of university management endeavors.

Institutional Management

These types of statements include comparatives, which strive to illustrate the university's position in the competitive environment: "… we are regularly cited, along with Harvard, Yale, MIT, Berkeley, Stanford, and some others, as one of the top institutions for undergraduate research." (Stony Brook, 2007);

> With outstanding leadership from many people in this room—former presidents Norm Hackerman, Peter Flawn, Bill Livingston, and Bill Cunningham—and most recently from President Larry Faulkner, we have made significant progress.

> The Times of London has already recognized UT as the third-best public university in the United States. (Texas, 2006); and,

> Through the implementation of our strategy, we have achieved substantial and increasing success across all our areas of activity. We have also received widespread external recognition, illustrated by the underlying trajectory of our world league table position. Our performance as a rolling average over three years puts us 102nd in the Times Higher Education world league table in 2008. (Leeds, 2008)

Some attention the institutional level is dedicated to organizational activities. Many of these statements refer to activities undertaken to enhance student experiences at the university: “You can see it in the six freshman colleges and the freshman seminars that make Stony Brook a leader in first-year education.” (Stony Brook, 2007);

> During the past year, our faculty collectively and within their colleges adopted the Achievement Centered Education program - a general education program based on assessment of student outcomes. This innovative program could transform undergraduate education both here and elsewhere. Our achievement is the envy of many of our peers across the country. (Nebraska, 2008)

> Since the first NSS [National Student Survey] in 2005 we have responded to areas identified for improvement through a number of initiatives such as a partnership agreement between the University and each student, peer mentoring, and improvements to teaching space and through targeted activities carried out by Schools and Faculties. The positive impact of this coordinated response was reflected in the results of the latest NSS in September 2008. This showed that not only had the University’s overall satisfaction score increased but that we had also

> improved in every question category and are improving faster than others in the sector. (Leeds, 2008)

Some of the organizational activities are aimed at knowledge and research-production, such that the outcomes benefit the institution through organizational efforts.

> I propose we create a Faculty of the Life Sciences in order to fashion a more coordinated faculty perspective to the life sciences. This proposal would have no impact on a faculty member's status within the disciplinary based departments but would serve as a forum for conversations across discipline lines — to share research interests, to learn about new life science faculty and the work of those recently tenured and promoted, to facilitate mutual assistance in recruiting life science faculty, to provide more active collaborations for speakers and colloquia, and to promote ideas for research or hiring initiatives that could draw on the resources of more than one discipline—in essence, to draw on the expertise and engagement of the faculty who want to participate to move the life science efforts of the university forward. (Nebraska, 2009)

Other attention is directed at institutional collaborations and relationships, especially those that do not involve local, state, national, or regional government and are directed at corporate or tech-transfer activities.

> The University also maintains its strong reputation and well-developed capability for supporting a range of enterprise and knowledge transfer activities, from applied research and consultancy through to our innovative student company start-up programme. We currently have 29 active Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), the fifth highest number in the UK and third highest in the

> Russell Group. An impressive 15 different schools have now been involved in KTPs. (Leeds, 2010)

> The expansion of incubators to a research and development park enabling our researchers, both faculty and students, to interact with corporate partners to build the high-tech solutions of the future; (Stony Brook, 2006)

> In the past year Isis [Oxford's tech-transfer and innovation hub] has again grown steadily, setting the platform for a review of its strategies. One option being considered is an increase in its organisational scale to align it better with the sizeable increases in research income the University is receiving. Such an increase would help to ensure opportunities are not missed, and that the expertise of Isis is being suitably leveraged to match the market opportunities it is identifying for Oxford's intellectual property. (Oxford, 2007)

It may be said that these statements do not actually represent *governance*, especially in light of the political definition above. However, it is my conviction that while they lack the inherent political nature of the governmental environment, as *institutional managment*, they reflect on the activities undertaken by the university in order to enhance the university. Usually, these activities are administration-led endeavors, included in the various documents as evidence of their accomplishments: "We have made encouraging strides in recent years in opening our doors more widely to people of different backgrounds, different experiences, and different economic means" (Harvard, 2007); as celebration of the internal management strategies that are affecting the university's status: "President Faulkner established a goal of hiring 300 new faculty members within 10 years" (UT, 2006); and the institutional relationships that make the university a world class entity: “We have major partnerships in China, India and in other countries around the world that provide us with research and enrollment opportunities as well as welcoming locations for our faculty and students” (Nebraska, 2009).

Each of these institutional management statements includes at least an implication of causal force. Phrases in the many quotes included above include *with outstanding leadership… we have made significant progress* (Texas, 2006), *Through the implementation of our strategy* (Leeds, 2008), *our faculty collectively adopted a general education program* (Nebraska, 2008), *this coordinated response* (Leeds, 2008), and, *I propose we create* (Nebraska, 2009). Each of these phrases implies a causal administrative force, driving action and ultimately the successes of the university. Again, while this may not be *governance*, it does represent the activities involved with managing the university in the competitive higher education environment.

Institutional management was equal in the United Kingdom and in the United States, 21% of each national sample of all status statements, with 82% of UK favorable governance statements and 81% of such statements in the US, with the balance falling slightly following the recession. Institutional status had an even greater impact on the attention paid to institutional management. Elite universities committed 89% (n=159) of all favorable governance statements to institutional accomplishments, whereas aspirational universities did so with only 77% (n= 242). As a component of all status statements, this represents 21% of all statements from both elite and aspirational universities.

Within the *favorable governance* category, two other subcategories emerged that illustrated the university’s place in the political and geographic environment. The first of these is *local and state governance*, wherein institutional managers refer to the university in a closely geopolitical context. Within this subcategory, “local and state” is meant to include the immediate region in which the university resides. In the United States, this is specifically local and state. In the United Kingdom, this is meant to include only the local metropolitan areas and the county in which the university resides (as a substitute for the state in the U.S. sample). The last of the favorable governance subcategories is *national and regional governance*. Again, this is defined from a U.S.-centric perspective, but is intended to be universal. In the U.S., the national constraint is that of the United States, which is responsible for a great deal of research funding. So, too, is the national dimension for universities in the United Kingdom. The regional dimension in the United States implies a connection at the North American level, although this was nearly nonexistent. In the United Kingdom, the regional component allowed the capture of the U.K.’s relationship to the European continent and the various governance structures influencing British higher education.

Local and State Governance

Again, the terms ‘local’ and ‘state’ are herein used to refer to the immediate geopolitical environment in which each university resides. For U.S. schools, this is limited to anything within the state that the university president cites. For the institutions in the U.K., this is the metropolitan area and the rough region of England in which is resides, such as Newcastle’s commitment “to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England” (Newcastle, 2009). While the elite universities in the U.S. sample are individually private institutions, they also have ties to the local and state governance structures. Harvard is specifically tied to the great

Boston area, as is MIT. Indeed, each school mentions collaborations with the other that span the local/regional geography, although these ignore the political relationship to the local area that is necessary for this category. Princeton, located between New York City and Philadelphia, is also tied to its geography through local and state relationships. However, of all the elite universities in the sample, only Cambridge identifies its geopolitical connection to its particular location: "The immense productivity of Greater Cambridge is itself a source of ideas about future international activity for the City and University alike" (Cambridge, 2007).

Local and state governance was cited in only 14% (n=70) of the favorable governance excerpts, usually referring to state or local support: "We will continue to work with our legislators to provide more support for Texas's great flagship university" (UT, 2009); "Twelve secondary schools and nine primary schools across Newcastle have been brought together in the Science Excellence and Innovation Partnership, the first of several planned across North East England" (Newcastle, 2009); "As the only research university on [Long] Island, we have a special responsibility to connect with the business, cultural, and governmental needs of our population through research, incubation, collaborative ventures, and meeting the educational needs" (Stony Brook, 2007). Each of these commitments to the local and state communities seems to be a remnant of the service component of the institutional mission, specifically addressing how that university will serve the community which financially and political empowers and enables the institution:

> I am completely committed to the role of a land-grant university to extend our teaching and research to the citizens of Nebraska. Serving the people in Nebraska

> through our teaching and research and focusing our teaching and our research to respond to the challenges facing our state benefactors is our highest calling. Those faculty and staff who directly engage with the people of Nebraska on their farms, at their businesses, and in their homes are critically important to our success. (Nebraska, 2009).

Universities in the United States were, understandably, twice as likely to reference the state and local dimension of governance, with 18% of the category, whereas universities in the United Kingdom did so in only 9% of these excerpts. Those statements in the U.K. are concentrated with 11 excerpts from Newcastle, 4 from Cambridge, and 2 from Leeds. Universities in the United Kingdom have recently experienced a change in how they are funded. The four institutions in this sample are all funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which is a national body. Thus, issues of funding and the institutional response to HEFCE formulae are represented in the national/regional governance subcategory. Another rational for this difference is that those universities dependent on state funds and governmental oversight are almost completely within the aspirational group, which committed 21% of all governance statements to issues at this level, ten times as frequently as elite universities.

Focus on local and state governance did not change following the recession, with 14% of all favorable governance statements before and after.

National and Regional Governance

In order to clarify the difference between a university's local commitments, and its place in the greater field of higher education, I categorized statements that focused on national issues (within the U.S. or within the U.K., respectively), or on issues applied to a greater, supra-national range (within North America or the greater Eurozone, respectively). These *national or regional governance* statements occurred least among the favorable governance set, in only 23 excerpts, about 5% of the total governance statements. These do not follow a common format, and it is interesting to note that of the 23 unique excerpts on national or regional governance, only five came from schools in the United States, while 13 were from Cambridge, 8 of which were from the Vice-Chancellor's annual address focused on Cambridge's role and position in the greater U.K. higher education system: "… Cambridge's standing in the world sustains and is rooted in the widely recognized strength of this country's university system as a whole" (Cambridge, 2009).

National and regional governance statements focused on the institution's role in the nation, region, and greater geopolitical environment:

> We concluded a unique and historic agreement with Iowa State University to collaborate on providing a veterinary medicine degree program to Nebraska residents. Students will take their first two years in Nebraska and their second two years at Iowa State. Collaborations between institutions in our region will become increasingly important for us in the future. (Nebraska, 2006);

> It is not a good time to call for increased investment, but the need is urgent nonetheless. Let us remember that Britain still spends less on higher education than most other OECD countries in terms of GDP, expenditure per student, and as a percentage of total expenditure on education. This under-investment extends not only to the public purse but also to the private sector, including students and their families. (Cambridge, 2009)

> In addition to consultancy work our academics take part in 26 Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, Europe's leading programme helping businesses improve their competitiveness and productivity through better use of technology and skills residing within the UK knowledge base. (Leeds, 2008)

A marked gap existed between how presidents and vice-chancellors at U.S. and U.K. universities addressed issues of national and regional governance, as schools in the United States committed only 2% of their total favorable governance statements to national or regional issues, less than a quarter of the U.K.'s 9%. The U.S. institutions that did consider the national/regional dimension were all in the aspirational group, with the University of Nebraska specifically declaring that "collaborations between institutions in our region will become increasingly important for us in the future" (Nebraska, 2006). Clearly, this 'regional' attention in the United States (connecting Nebraska with Iowa, and by extension the American Midwest) is a different sort of 'region' to Leeds' attention to the Eurozone and Cambridge's extension to the British Commonwealth. I acknowledge that the borders of these regions are different sorts of entities, but posit that due to the ethnocentric nature of the United States, and the (albeit reluctant) cosmopolitan nature of the United Kingdom, each population defines its regional 'neighbors' differently. Each of these notions of region, though, is a nationally normed conception.

As should be evidenced by Cambridge's commitment to the national and regional, 8% of all such statements came from elite institutions, while aspirational universities made only 3% of their governance statements in this vein. However, *all* of Cambridge's statements occurred in 2009 and 2010, after the recession and the introduction of dramatic changes in the HEFCE funding formula. There was an increase in national/regional consideration after the recession, with the ratio doubling from 3% before the recession to 6% after, which can almost entirely be attributed to Cambridge's attention to the category, as three other universities (Nebraska, Oxford, and Texas) made single statements after the recession on this scale.

Texas identifies the role of the national government in raising bureaucratic barriers to research production:

> The regulatory costs on higher education are enormous. It may actually be our biggest drain on productivity. On our campus, we have compliance requirements with over a hundred regulatory structures, often requiring duplicative and inconsistent reports. The costs are in the tens of millions of dollars. One indicator is that over twenty years the time required of a principal investigator on bureaucratic tasks has increased from 10 to 40 percent. This means that our most productive people are diverted from the role of production.
>
> These requirements come from the federal government, the State, the System, and the campus. We simply must reduce these costs. Higher education is drowning in them. (Texas, 2010)

Oxford addresses the role in regional funding for research:

> Last year I remarked on the impressive growth of funded research activity throughout the University and colleges… The growth is evident across the disciplinary spectrum, with the largest proportionate increase being in the humanities. In terms of sources of funding, the proportion of internationally sourced funding in the portfolio has been increasing steadily. That now stands at 18 per cent, around a third of which comes from the EU. (Oxford, 2008)

Nebraska paid attention to its increasing efforts to attract national attention in an attempt to improve its financial situation:

> We are interacting with private-sector companies, large and small, local and national, who see potential value in forging partnerships with us. We acquired title to the former state fair grounds for development of our Innovation Campus and work there is under way. (Nebraska, 2010)

The final post-recession entrant was from the SUNY Strategic Plan and focused philosophically on the national role of land-grant universities as applied in the SUNY system:

> SUNY represents an expansive reimagining of one of the great American reforms: the land grant university. Created by acts of Congress and signed into law by Abraham Lincoln, land grant universities leveled the playing field, making it possible for every person and every community to experience higher education's transformative power. The land grants focused their research on contemporary problems. Their extension services brought the expertise of the university directly into people's homes and communities in the form of health advice, home economics and agriculture. By giving demonstrated value to college education, the land grants convinced ordinary Americans that higher education was the pathway to a better future. Today, SUNY, by virtue of the extraordinary range of our 64 campuses, elevates the land grant concept to a new level. (SUNY (SP), 2010)

Many of these statements follow a consideration of increased outsourcing for funds or other resources, and as the bulk of these statements come from universities in the

United Kingdom, it should be of no surprise that these statements speak to the European nature of the higher education environment:

> “There are new and future opportunities that we need to consider. From a personal perspective, Europe and the EU are often forgotten but developments such as Joint Programming, Framework Programme 8 and the European Research Area will need to be explored.” (Cambridge, 2010)

It is interesting that leaders of each of these world-class universities do not spend more time and attention placing the institution an international context. While the universities in the U.K. acknowledge the existence of international governance beyond Great Britain, none in the U.S. sample stretch their attention beyond the nation. Even those national comments are restrained to peer-comparisons such as those tying Nebraska to Iowa, and rarely carry a governmental component to them beyond the university. In the United States, the national attention is limited to only the aspirational schools, and then addressed in primarily financial terms, such as Stony Brook’s recognition of a specific federal grant: “This year we also received $1.4 million from the federal government for merit-based scholarships” (Stony Brook 2006).

> The historic autonomy of this country’s universities, embodied in our arm’s-length relationship with government, has surely been critical to our success and distinctiveness. It has underpinned creativity and experimentation for institutions, and freedom of enquiry for individual academics. (Cambridge, 2009)

I believe this is indicative of U.S. higher education. The U.S. national market is broad, with 62 universities in the AAU. However, only two schools are from outside the United States—McGill University and the University of Toronto in Canada. This illustrates the rarity of “North American” consideration beyond U.S. soil. Further, the U.S. funding model is such that beyond tuition and state support (for the three public universities) or endowment returns (for the included private universities), much of the remaining income for the U.S. universities comes from the federal government through research grants and federal student aid. The only comment on federal aid is the reference made, above, by Stony Brook in 2006. Aside from that instance, institutional leaders in the U.S. refer to federal aid without identifying the governmental forces that create those political relationships.

On the contrary, the United Kingdom is proximal to a greater variety of external funding agencies such as the European Research Area or even agencies in the U.S.: “In addition, Professor Farrar’s work is benefiting from a US$29m award from the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases” (Oxford, 2006). The United Kingdom shares maritime borders with a number of other nations, is mere hours from many national capitals and research centers by air, and the creation of the European Union and the Eurozone has decreased many barriers in Europe in ways that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) did not for the United States. The United Kingdom is a member of the European Higher Education area, and many universities participate in the Erasmus Mundus exchange program for European students in higher education. Proximity, culture, and regulatory differences help to explain the university vice-chancellor’s prevalence of consideration of higher education beyond national governance.

Concentration of Talent

The category *concentration of talent* refers to "top students and outstanding faculty" (Salmi, 2009, p. 5) necessary for the success of top-tier research. While those factors were common, there was greater differentiation within this category than in the other categories [Figures 10; 11]. The nature of the 'presidential address' includes recognizing the university constituents, specifically the work of faculty, administration, staff, and the students who attend the institution. While there are functional and definitional differences meant by the term *faculty* in the U.K. and the U.S., for this study I used it to refer to any reference to a teacher, professor, researcher, or other institutional academic. It is possible that this reference lumped in postdoctoral, doctoral, masters, or other scholars that would not otherwise be referred to as faculty, but *none* of the presidents or vice-chancellors parsed the terminology of their academic staff. Further, the U.S. universities employ non-tenured faculty, postdoctoral scholars, lecturers, adjuncts, and other individuals that may not be faculty, but they too would be included in the concentration of talent subcategory *faculty*. Administrators were only recognized when specifically identified by the presidents and vice-chancellors as institutional administrators. Staff, which could be any of a number of positions, refers to nonacademic employees and administrative personnel below the level of the named institutional administrators. Students were identified as either graduate students or undergraduates, wherever possible. Finally, the accomplishments of the university were sometimes recognized through the acknowledgment of some award recipient.

Since the work of the university includes education, it follows that the type of recognition should focus on faculty. Indeed, faculty received 33% of the *concentration of talent* references. These excerpts usually afforded the faculty direct recognition:

> The scholarly societies found much to commend at Oxford: eight new Fellows of the British Academy, seven new Fellows of the Royal Society, seven new Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences, two new Fellows of the Royal Academy of Engineering, and four Oxonians admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. (Oxford, 2008)

They also welcomed new members: “I also would like to welcome the 45 new members of the faculty whose distinguished scholarly achievements and dedication to teaching are certain to enhance Princeton's reputation for excellence in research and in undergraduate and graduate education” (Princeton, 2007). In each scenario, faculty are the prime recipient of talent notices. The recession had little effect, with 33% of the group prior to the recession, and 34% of the group after the recession. Universities in the United States were slightly more likely (36%) to recognize faculty than were universities in the United Kingdom (29%).

Elite universities paid slightly less attention to their faculty (30%) than did their aspirational counterparts (36%), perhaps due to the nature of aspiring to higher status, which requires greater recognition for successes. Indeed, while the aspirational universities have more work to be done in developing a widely-recognized reputation, some of the universities in the aspirational set recognized the same academics in successive years: “Guggenheim Fellowships were awarded to Diana Davis of geography, Neil Foley and Cynthia Talbot of history, and A. Van Jordan of English” (Texas, 2007);

“Diana Davis in Geography, Neil Foley and Cynthia Talbot in History, and A. Van Jordan in English won Guggenheim fellowships” (Texas, 2008). Elite institutions are internationally recognized and thus it is less necessary for them to commit as much to self-aggrandizement, although it is realistic to expect that their accomplishments would be greater or more common, even if recognized with some level of humility and institutional legacy:

> Colleagues too numerous to record here were awarded medals and prizes. I mention two of them to give you a flavour. Sir Roger Penrose, Emeritus Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics, was awarded the Royal Society’s Copley Medal for his contributions to geometry and mathematical physics. The Copley Medal is the Society’s oldest prize for scientific achievement. (Oxford, 2008)

> In recognition of their achievements, three members of the MIT community were awarded the nation's highest science and technology honors in July. Institute Professor Robert Langer and Lester Wolfe Professor of Physics Emeritus Daniel Kleppner won the National Medal of Science, bringing to 47 the number of MIT scientists to win the medal, and President Emeritus Charles Vest joined four engineers and inventors from MIT who have previously won the National Medal of Technology. (MIT, 2007b)

Faculty recognition was not confined to the awards and accomplishments of university academics. In many cases, presidents and vice-chancellors recognized that the institution relies on faculty for a number of endeavors, not least among them the pursuit and acquisition of competitive research funds:

> Our faculty again demonstrated the vibrancy of our scientific enterprise by attracting an impressive volume of federal stimulus grants—more than 250, plus many more secured by faculty in our affiliated hospitals. (Harvard, 2010)

> Our academics are in high demand across the world, many working with global corporations including Tesco, Rolls-Royce, BP, GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca. In 2009/10 some 36% of our academics were involved in applied research or as consultants to industry—an increase of 3% from last year—with an estimated annual contract value of £54m. (Leeds, 2010)

> Unleashing the talent of our faculty and making some key investments has significantly enhanced our competitiveness in research and has opened several opportunities to contribute to Nebraska's economy. (Nebraska, 2007)

Academics are responsible for quality teaching, such that faculty were recognized for their commitment and success in the classroom:

> Our excellent teaching was recognised in June by the award of a National Teaching Fellowship from the Higher Education Academy, bringing the total number of such awards to 16—more than any other English university. (Leeds, 2009a)

Further, faculty are recognized as a vital component of the institution, and that continuing recruitment and retention of diverse, talented faculty is necessary at a competitive, world class university:

> We will continue to bring the most talented people to this university — by seeking out the most outstanding scholars in the world, and by opening our doors

> as wide as possible to students of exceptional ability and promise. (Harvard, 2009)

> Yet our academic staff and students will remain the most precious asset that this University possesses. Throughout the 800-year history of Cambridge, we have been able to attract the very best staff and students, who in turn have ensured the enviable reputation we have today. Our task is to ensure that we can continue to do so while retaining the core values of academic freedom and the pursuit of excellence in all that we do. (Cambridge, 2010)

The other dominant focus of an educational institution, beyond research, is education. As could be expected, undergraduates are cited second-most frequently, following faculty. This 22% of the talent statements, usually focussed on the successful recruitment of quality students:

> The University Honors Program and the J.D. Edwards Honors Program compete favorably against any university in attracting highly credentialed students (UNL, 2006);

> Fair access for the very best students, be they from the UK or from further afield is essential. Cambridge must raise the aspirations of potential candidates and continue to admit undergraduate students on the principle that intellectual potential is the sole criterion. (Cambridge, 2010)

> The Class of 2010 is every bit as remarkable as its recent predecessors. Applications for the Class of 2010 increased 9% over the previous year, to an all-time high of 11,373, and 67% of those accepted chose to enroll—another record. (MIT, 2006)

> Our students simply get better every year, and our undergraduate class of 2013 is the best, in terms of SAT scores and GPA, that we have ever had. (Stony Brook, 2009)

Further consideration was given to the diversity and international nature of the incoming undergraduate student body, and included insurances to protect the needs and aspirations of the least economically gifted students. "And the enrollment of the most diverse freshman class in Harvard history" (Harvard, 2009); "Consider this year's entering class is the most diverse in history with higher numbers of both students of color and international students" (Nebraska, 2009).

> We want to give all those who can benefit from a Leeds education the opportunity to study here. To this end we are developing a smarter applications process which takes account of an applicant's background, including socio-economic group, and helps us identify those who could benefit from our nationally-acclaimed Access to Leeds scheme. (Leeds, 2009a)

> The 1,244 new undergraduates, in what I have every expectation will eventually become the Great Class of 2011 (once you have earned your Tiger stripes), hail from 44 countries and 48 states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam. (Princeton, 2007)

The elite schools in the U.S. continued this strain, but added in specific gestures representing their massive financial resources to ensure that students would not find price a barrier to attendance.

> The Institute will continue need-blind admission of undergraduates and will meet each undergraduate's full demonstrated financial need; these commitments

> actually demand an increase in our financial aid budget, which will rise 10% to $82 million next year. (MIT, 2009b)

> Throughout the Schools we have substantially increased our investment in financial aid—by nearly 30 percent in the past three years alone. We will continue striving not only to enroll the very best students from across the economic spectrum, but also to ensure that the burden of excessive debt does not deter our graduates from pursuing careers reflecting their highest aspirations. (Harvard, 2008)

Beyond the qualities of the incoming students, universities worked to recognize the accomplishments of undergraduates.

> Amongst other outstanding successes this year were biology student Charlotte Fayle who beat 21,000 entrants to be named the 'UK's Most Enterprising Student' at the Shell STEP National Final Awards 2009, and a team of Leeds students who won Ernst & Young's Profitunity! competition. (Leeds, 2009c)

> In this uncertain time, several measures underscore MIT's enduring strengths. Eighteen of our students received Rhodes, Marshall and Fulbright honors this year, many more than in any previous year. (MIT, 2009b)

Universities in the United Kingdom were less likely (19%) to recognize the talents of the undergraduate class, while their U.S. counterparts did so in about a quarter of the talent-statements. This may be due to U.S. dependence on undergraduate tuition, an academic culture that incoming undergraduate students are the measure of success for a university through increased selectivity or measurable SAT/ACT scores:

> Of the 1,005 exceptional students now enrolled as MIT freshmen, 44% were valedictorians, and 89% graduated in the top 5%, of their high school classes. They come from 49 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia, and from 51 foreign countries; 46% of them are women, bringing our undergraduate population to 44% women. (MIT, 2006)

> Each one of you belongs at Princeton, and you will soon find your place here. You were chosen with enormous care from a very impressive group of applicants, and each of you brings a distinctive history and array of talents to the class of 2012. (Princeton, 2008)

Presidents and vice-chancellors shifted their focus after the recession, with undergraduates receiving 26% of the notice prior to the recession, falling to 19% after. Institutional status played less of a role in the balance, with elite universities spending 23% of their recognition on undergraduates, while aspirational institutions did so only 21% of the time. The bulk of these aspirational university statements come from institutions in the United States—each school a state university required to admit a portion of the state's graduating classes—whereas only 17 of the 93 aspiring university statements on undergraduates came from the British Universities, Leeds and Newcastle.

The other component of the educational mission of the university is the preparation of graduate students. Given that each of these universities is a world-renowned research institution, and research at that level is done in graduate student labs and programs, it is surprising that attention to graduate students was markedly less than attention to undergraduate students. Graduate students received attention from the presidents and vice-chancellors in 17% of the total talent statements, compared to 22% of statements dedicated to undergraduate students. This type of recognition followed different patterns from undergraduates, predominantly focusing on the international nature and global competition for recruitment at this level: “Our doctoral students hail, of course, from many other states and countries. This year 45 percent of our new doctoral students are international, coming from 35 different countries” (Stony Brook, 2006);

> Last year, 29 per cent of full-time taught postgraduates were UK citizens, 15 per cent came from the rest of Europe, and 56 per cent came from the rest of the world. The pattern for full-time research graduates is similar: 41 per cent from the UK, 18 per cent from the rest of Europe, and 41 per cent from the rest of the world. (Oxford, 2007);

> Ten years ago we enrolled fewer than 3,900 graduate students; today it is almost 4,600 who were selected from the largest and most competitive applicant pools in our history. In research, the numbers are equally compelling. (Nebraska, 2010)

Some attention was given to recognizing the importance of quality and their role in serving both the educational and research components of the mission: “Our graduate students make critical contributions to our integrated mission of education and research. This September we welcomed almost 2,000 new graduate students to the Institute” (MIT, 2007b). More, though, was spent admitting that in order to be competitive, an institution needed to do more to recruit and fund graduate students: “We need to continue to add money to stipends for graduate students until we catch up with our competitors” (Texas, 2009);

> Forty-five per cent of our full-time fee-liable graduate students are fully funded from sources other than their personal funds, although this figure varies

> depending on the level of the degree being taken, and the discipline of that degree. The figures are 11 per cent for professional master's students, 30 per cent for other master's students, and 59 per cent for D.Phil students. However, in the Humanities and Social Sciences only around 40 per cent of D.Phil students are fully funded. This contrasts with an estimated 70 per cent (or more) in MPLS and Medical Sciences. A recent survey of international applicants who declined their Oxford offer found that almost two thirds of the respondents said they did so because of the uncompetitive financial element. (Oxford, 2007)

I suspect that presidents and vice-chancellors pay more attention to undergraduates than graduate student as a function of mission, a distinction made based on the individual institution's demographic makeup. As a whole, elite universities focused on graduate students with nearly a quarter of the talent statements, while their aspirational counterparts focused only about a sixth of their attention on graduate students. In fact, presidents and vice-chancellors at elite universities recognized undergraduates the same *number* of times as they recognized graduate students (n=72), while the presidents and vice-chancellors at aspirational universities merely recognized undergraduates *more* than they recognized graduate students (n=96, and n=59, respectively). As each aspirational university has a distinctly larger undergraduate student body than the elite universities, this differentiation is not all that surprising, which allows for greater attention at elite universities to focus on the role of graduate and professional students: "Applications climbed in nearly all of our graduate and professional schools, with numbers at or near historical highs in business, design, education, government, law, and medicine" (Harvard, 2010).

Further differentiation of graduate student recognition was far more pronounced due to geographic location than following the recession. Universities in the United Kingdom focused 22% of the talent statements on graduate students, perhaps explained by the heavy focus on graduate students at Cambridge (n=17) and Oxford (n=30), whereas Leeds and Newcastle *combined* only cited their graduate students 17 times (n=11 and n=6, respectively). U.S. universities attended to graduate students only 14% of the time, but the trend was reversed, with aspirational universities attending to graduate students more frequently (n=42) almost twice as frequently as elite U.S. universities (n=25). Indeed, the elite universities in the United Kingdom were on par with the aspirational universities in the United States.

Thus, attention to graduate students depends on a number of details. Geography implies that a vice-chancellor would be more likely to recognize the accomplishments and role of talented graduated students if the university is in the United Kingdom. However, status plays a role within geographic groups, such that presidents and vice-chancellors at elite universities in the U.K. and those at aspirational universities in the U.S. are more likely to attend to the concentration of graduate talent. Again, this seems somewhat counterintuitive, in that the elite U.S. institutions depend heavily on graduate research production for their status and accomplishments.

The final consideration on the recognition of graduate talent is whether or not presidents and vice-chancellors changed their discourse following the advent of the recession. While they did reduce attention to graduate students, with the 18% focus pre-recession diminishing to 16% after the recession, the change is relatively small, and as a fraction of the total statements (not just of concentration of talent statements) remained at 7% before and after the recession.

Another category for individual recognition of concentration of talent revolved around administrative accomplishments, in 16% of all talent statements. While this is somewhat mirrored by the *academic management* subcategory under favorable governance, the common theme is to recognize individual accomplishments of administrators and staff and their role in serving the institution, usually recognizing new additions or specific work at the university: “The commitment, creativity and energy of all our staff is vital to achieving our vision and key to this is creating a supportive environment where people can reach their full potential” (Leeds, 2009a);

> We were also fortunate to have Ann Chang Barnes available to become interim director of the Lied Center and Dick Hoffmann to become interim director of the Sheldon Museum. Both Lied and Sheldon play such a significant role in the quality of life we enjoy at this university. (UNL, 2008);

> The American Repertory Theatre will soon welcome a new artistic director, Diane Paulus, a Harvard alumna known for both her acclaimed productions and her interest in enlivening the interactions between the A.R.T. and the larger University community. (Harvard, 2008)

Recognition of administration and staff accomplishments, increased after the recession by about a third. Universities in the United Kingdom are about a third less likely to recognize administration and staff than U.S. universities. Some of this may be attributable to differences in university structure, and the ensuing audience of the various annual addresses. Universities in the United Kingdom were split between public addresses at the elite universities and annual reports at the aspirational universities. Thus, the content of the annual reports did not lend to recognizing individuals directly as only one instance of recognition of administrative talent did so at the aspirational level: “I am pleased to welcome the appointment of Professor John Fisher to the new post of Deputy Vice-Chancellor” (Leeds, 2006). The attention to administrative talent paid by the rest of the presidents and vice-chancellors at aspirational universities was in broad general terms: “We must make sure that we maintain and develop the high quality of staff we employ” (Leeds, 2006); “The commitment, creativity and energy of all our staff is vital to achieving our vision” (Leeds, 2009a); “Our successes as well as our plans are based on the continued commitment of talented and dedicated staff” (Newcastle, 2010).

Elite universities in the U.K. continued this type of recognition: “They [faculty] are supported by committed and professional staff whose contribution is no less important in serving the needs of scholarship” (Cambridge, 2010). However, Oxford took care to recognize individuals and their accomplishments much like occurred in the U.S.: “When the divisional structure was introduced at the beginning of this decade, Dr. Fleming assumed the headship of the Medical Sciences Division” (Oxford, 2008); “I also want to thank publicly Dr Julie Maxton, who completes her term as Registrar in January and will take up a new role as Executive Director of the Royal Society” (Oxford, 2010). This format of recognizing the individual deans and other administrators mirror’s Oxford’s tradition of closing the annual oration with a section on *comings, goings, and remembrances*, naming every retiree, transfer, employee and academic who elected to leave for other posts, and every member of Oxford who had passed on.

Institutional status play little role in administrative recognition, with elite universities recognizing their accomplishments barely more frequently than aspirational universities. Within the individual nations, the split is roughly even between aspirational and elite universities, such that there are no discernable differences between which universities are recognizing administration and staff on either continent. As compared to recognition of graduate students, the state of the university address (or its equivalent) is one of the rare instances that administration may be recognized for their accomplishments. Faculty, graduate students, and even undergraduate students earn awards and recognition at many levels. But the accomplishments of administrators are often nuanced, private affairs that result in a slight increase in enrollment or the savings of a percentage of the endowment. These institution-specific recognitions are, perhaps, necessary, whereas quality faculty and students could nominally receive the same recognition regardless of their institution.

Finally, in 12% of the *concentration of talent* references, the leader specifies the receipt of an award of some kind, identifying the accomplishments on the national and international scale of a member of the institution. None of these statements occurred in a strategic plan, as those documents are designed to wholly look forward and it is, perhaps, presumptuous to declare a goal of intending to win more Nobel prizes than in the past. Universities in the United Kingdom were more than twice as likely to recognize an award recipient than universities in the United States. Aspirational universities were similarly twice as likely to recognize these accomplishments than elite institutions. The recession had far less impact than institutional type, with 11% of pre-recession talent statements focused on awards, and 13% of post-recession statements doing so. Newcastle, as an aspirational university in the United Kingdom, is responsible for 25 of the 92 award statements—which occur predominantly after the recession. It is possible that this is a feature of the “Newcastle Style” for public discourse. Nebraska and Harvard each made singular recognitions of an award, while Princeton and Cambridge made none. Oxford bucked the elite trend, and is responsible for 19 of the 23 talent statements on awards from elite universities.

As an exploration of who receives these awards, I further defined the *award* subcategory with specific recipients. 43% of all award recipients were faculty or researchers, with an additional 28% dedicated to recognizing some kind of institutional award. Graduate students and undergraduates were specifically identified in 11% and 13% of the award-recognitions, respectively. There was only one administrator specifically identified in the sample as an award recipient, but four non-administrative staff members received such compliments (4% of the total). Universities in the United States were almost twice as likely to recognize faculty awards than those in the United Kingdom. The trend is reversed for recognition of graduate students, with universities in the United Kingdom recognizing graduate-student awards eight times as frequently as in the United States, as more than twice as frequently with institutional. Elite universities are ten times as likely to recognize graduate students, compared to universities in the aspirational group. Aspirational schools did three times more award comparison at the institutional level than their elite counterparts. After the recession, recognition of graduate students receiving awards fell to almost a quarter of the pre-recession total, while recognition of faculty increased by about a fifth, and undergraduate award recognitions doubled.

Analysis of Intentional Speech

Each of these initial analyses reveals the institutional focus of SLAs and Strategic Plans. However, each within-group analysis in incomplete without a further exploration of the greater picture within the whole data sample. Figure 12 provides the total breakdown between all subcategories, with figure 13 further illustrating the percentage differences within all categories. Referring back to the initial parent-group analysis, there is a clear difference when considering the whole subcategory analysis. The original balance between the three parent categories was clear, with *abundant resources* 36% of the sample, *favorable governance* in 29% of the sample, and *concentration of talent* in 35% of the sample. After expanding these three categories to better identify the content of the statements, it became clear that the most common status statements focused on institutional governance (23% of all statements), funding/grants/money (18% of all statements), and then the accomplishments of faculty (13% of all statements). These three subcategories represent over half of all status statements, but further illustrate that there is a discrepancy between categories. In the original analysis, Salmi's (2009) categories for world-class institutional success is split seemingly-equally between three broad groups. However, the actual representation is far narrower than Salmi seems to have envisioned.

When considering the entire set of all subgroup excerpts, local and state governance is cited in less than 4% of the excerpts, while national and regional governance is only present in about 1%. Again, like the sample of *abundant resources*, which is focused predominantly on funding rather than facilities, while presidents and vice-chancellors may refer to a broad collection of governance issues the preponderance is focused on the activities of the institution itself, countering Salmi's promotion of the political dimension.

Further, due to the depth of the axial coding, it is possible to recreate the parent categories from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. The original balance of 36% abundant resources, 29% favorable governance, and 35% concentration of talent do not capture the potentiality of cross-coding. Utilizing only the three parent-categories, there are 1,629 code applications in the 1,414 excerpts. Looking at the subcategories reveals 1,888 code applications, which can then be summed to recreate the parent categories. Doing this reveals that abundant resources is actually 33% of all status statements, favorable governance is only 26%, and concentration of talent takes the lead with 41% of all status statements, when considering that a given statement may count in more than on category.

Intentions and Accomplishments

Initial suspicions

A precursor to this project investigated whether or not the recession was followed by a change in how university presidents discussed their institutional status. The focus was on how presidents used the phrase 'world class' in their annual addresses. Thus, I developed an initial study that attempted to analyze presidential speech with this constraint. I collected state of the university addresses from five public, state institutions in the United States. The included institutions were the University of California at Davis, the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis (although that sample included attention to the state system), the Ohio State University, Penn State, and the University of Texas at Austin. Each was a research-intensive university, although not all were members of the

AAU. I sampled state of the university addresses from (2006–2010) and coded the content to detect the institutional presentation of *world-class* status. However, this was ultimately unsuccessful due to a too-narrow analysis of the discourse.

What the pilot study did reveal, though, that following the recession there was a difference *what* was said, but in *how* it was said. Presidents and vice-chancellors in the made different *types* of statements about status, revealing institutional aspirations and validations of institutional activities. Statements about the institution's *intentions* were common in the pilot study, articulating the broad goals and future endeavors they wished to achieve. After the recession, though, these types of intentional statements disappeared, replaced by statements *validating* the university's accomplishments. Validating statements couched the university accomplishments in concrete terms, identifying those endeavors that had come to fruition and which had measurable results. I suspect that the presence of such differentiation in speech methodology was due to the state-funded nature of the five schools in the sample, as they struggled to make their mission necessary to the state and secure their futures. As such, I expected to find similar results in this data set, with presidents and vice-chancellors modifying their language from language of intention to validating language.

Intentional Analysis

Analysis based on statement intentions and validations is included as an additional lens. Thus, the lens of statement type based on Salmi's (2009) categorical requirements for world-class universities was modified with an additional layer derived from the pilot study. Each statement represents either an *intention* or an *action*. Intentional statements—usually marked by verbal modifiers such as *must* or *need*—speak to the aspirations of the university. Action statements—usually marked by recognition of past-tense accomplishment—speak to the activities of the university that the president or vice-chancellor has elected to recognize as validating the university's success. Thus, analysis of the content through the binary validating/aspirational lens grants some insight into *how* presidents and vice-chancellors conceptualize institutional accomplishment and direction.

Statements that spoke to the needs, desires, and goals of the institution without citing a specific accomplishment were labeled *intentional*: "Given our location and our comparative advantages, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln must be at the cutting edge of life science research and education" (Nebraska, 2006); "In the long run, we need to continue to focus on faculty salaries, but we need to do more than that. We need to have a fully funded sabbatical research leave program" (Texas, 2009); "…both public and private investment in higher education must continue to grow over the coming years" (Cambridge, 2009);

> From engineering to theater, from interdisciplinary science to art to law, and in innumerable fields around and in between, we have opportunities not just to advance our efforts in discrete fields, but to work to become a university known more for bridges and less for walls. (Harvard, 2007)

Statements that spoke to measurable, extant accomplishments were labeled *validating*, in that they worked to validate the status and accomplishments of the university. These statements addressed every topic in the various addresses, and identified specific accomplishments of university faculty, staff, students, and administrators, and the institutional plans and accomplishments: "Unleashing the talent of our faculty and making some key investments has significantly enhanced our competitiveness in research and has opened several opportunities to contribute to Nebraska's economy" (Nebraska, 2007); "We have made encouraging strides in recent years in opening our doors more widely to people of different backgrounds, different experiences, and different economic means" (Harvard, 2007); "We're second only to MIT in external research funding among universities without a medical school" (Texas, 2010); "The beginning signs of a possible stabilization of the economy, the proactive steps we have all taken since last winter and our endowment results have, together, somewhat reduced the total budget reductions the Institute will need to achieve" (MIT, 2009);

> I also would like to welcome the 33 new members of the faculty whose distinguished scholarly achievements and dedication to teaching in dozens of disciplines are certain to enhance Princeton's reputation for excellence in research and in undergraduate and graduate education. (Princeton, 2010);

> We have strengthened our representation overseas with a new office in Shanghai playing a key role in raising our profile in China. This new office, together with our existing offices in Delhi and Kuala Lumpur, supports student recruitment and market development across learning and teaching, research, alumni activities and public relations. (Leeds, 2008)

Of the 1,414 statements made in these documents, 357 were intentional and 1,057 were validating. These are represented by 1,629 code-applications, of which 26% were intentional statements and 74% were validating statements. This balance forms the baseline for further analysis at the categorical level. When investigating the balance of discourse before and after the recession, the movement is less than a percentage point, with 26% of pre-recession statements and 26% of post-recession statements each being intentional.

There was some movement in each category, but the most dramatic change was that validating statements about favorable governance fell by a quarter after the recession. Validating statements about abundant resources increased marginally, as did concentration of talent statements. Intentional statements showed an opposite trend, with marginal increases after the recession taking place in favorable governance, while the marginal decreases came from intentional statements about abundant resources and concentration of talent.

Looking at these data through the location lens reveals similar results. Again, the balance of pre/post statements is 26% aspirational, 74% validating. Controlling for geographic location does not change this much, with the U.K. universities experiencing a 25%/75% balance, and the U.S. universities a 27%/73% balance. U.S. universities made 50% more intentional statements of favorable governance than U.K. universities, and 20% more validating statements on the concentration of talent than their British counterparts. British universities made more validating statements about abundant resources and favorable governance, than universities in the United States. Intentional statements about abundant resources and concentration of talent were nominally equal at U.K. and U.S. universities.

University status barely impacted intentional statements of abundant resources and favorable governance, with aspirational universities slightly more likely to recognize issues of governance than elite universities, and elite universities slightly more likely to comment on resources than aspirational schools. Aspirational universities are far more dependent upon issues of governance beyond the institution than elite universities. Further, universities in the aspirational tier have greater budget volatility and depend for a far greater component of their operations on the financial security and well-being of the state. Much of the attention to financial operation was at the elite universities, including consideration of enormous endowment returns (prior to the recession) and both hopes that the economy would improve and the continued fiscal security of the university (after the recession). The rest of the aspirational/validating analysis based on university status was effectively flat.

Again, the balance was roughly 26% intentional, 74% validating, with only slight variance (+/- 1%) for institutional type. While the impact of this lens was greater in the initial study, it appears that upon reconditioning it is not as revelatory as I had originally hoped. Some of the analysis in the initial study may be due to the difference in institutional sample, which looked at public universities exclusively, and excluded universities from outside the U.S. Due to the funding models of public universities, I expected greater differentiation in what took place at the elite U.S. universities in this sample. Further, due to tier-differences I expected the elite universities to focus more on accomplishments than aspirations, when compared with lower-tier universities. But in the broad sample, with what I intended as an equitable balance of universities of varying type, this additional level of aspirational/validating analysis is not as revealing as was hoped.

Conclusions, and further analysis

The analysis of leadership statements of presidents and vice-chancellors, in the context of world-class activities and recognitions provides a glimpse into the narrative of status in the sampled universities. Salmi's (2009) categorization of the features of world-class universities provides a narrow view of the overall institutional discourse. By attending to the preponderance of statements that reflect the abundant resources, concentration of talent, and favorable governance we develop an understanding that there is great variance in institutional interpretation of what 'world class' means in these contexts. Further, as the variance increases and shifts when considering these contexts in light of differences in institutional rank, geographic location, and the advent of the recession, it becomes apparent that the common theme is differentiation in the field of world-class, research-intensive higher education.

While revealing that field-differentiation in higher education is taking place, this numeric attention to types of statements made within the confines of the categorical segments of world-class universities does not present an adequate picture of the discourse. The goal of this project was to gain an understanding of how presidents and vice-chancellors present address institutional status in a world-class context. Using the limitations of status—as defined by Salmi's categories of world-class activities, and further defined by subcategories and statement type—we are left with recognition of differences in the narratives at these institutions. Further, there are clearly differences in how presidents and vice-chancellors approach the topic of status, as evidenced by these data. What is not revealed, though, is *what is being said*, such that further analysis is warranted. The following chapter delves back into the data to attempt to detect the narratives presented by presidents and vice-chancellors as regards to their institution's status.

Chapter 5: Findings, Phase Two—Official Institutional Narratives

A secondary reading of the included document sample revealed two broad narrative themes present throughout the discourse. This section analyzes each theme in the context of the various research questions: analysis of variance by country, between the universities in the U.K. and the U.S.; analysis of variance over time, before and after the recession; and analysis of variance between institutional tiers woven into the country and time analyses. Some of these findings are dependent upon combinations of analysis, such as the difference between the narrative in the United Kingdom, before and after the recession. This chapter addresses each narrative theme separately, with in-depth analysis of how the individual questions of time, place, and tier altered the official discourse at the included world-class research universities.

The two driving narratives identified in the discourse will be addressed independently, although there is some conceptual overlap. The first, *success takes a village*, revolves around the concept that a collegiate university requires the strength and commitment of all involved, in order to accomplish the university mission. The second, *we are world class*, focuses on how the president or vice-chancellor envisions the university's role in the world-class field of higher education. Each of these narratives speaks to the mission of the institution, to how the presidents and vice-chancellors frame the role of members of the university constituency, and how they and their institution rationalize the product of the university's endeavors.

By focusing on these two narratives, I investigate the difference in meanings each tier of university ascribes to the concepts contained in the narratives. While *success takes a village* means different things at different universities, it is constrained at all these universities by the idea that in order to be successful the university must depend on the efforts of all members of the university constituency. However, at the universities in the aspirational tier, success also means focusing on *some* areas of excellence rather than on competitive excellence in all areas as is expected at universities in the elite tier. Similarly, the concept of *world class* is different between the two tiers in this study. While all the universities are members of world-leading research groups, the concepts that define *world class* are not uniform. As will be made evident from the study, the geographic and cultural conceptions of global impact, world class, and/or international reputation are fundamentally different even among members of the AAU and the Russell Group.

Success takes a village

> I am prouder than ever to be affiliated with Stony Brook University and its amazing faculty, staff, and students... the greatness that you will hear me talk about today would not be possible without your dedicated efforts and the value that you place on professional and academic excellence and superior service to our students and our community. (Stony Brook, 2010)

Each university in the sample supported the concepts that success at a university requires everyone at the university to pursue excellence, continued success requires the coordinated efforts of all members of the constituency, and collective efforts are the reason for the university’s world-class accomplishments and status. Combined, these concepts form the idea that success takes the entire community. Presidents and vice-chancellors recognized the commitment and endeavors of the community to illustrate the breadth of excellence. This recognition took several forms, from specifically identifying the faculty and staff for their contributions, to acknowledging the community *as* a community with common goals. Presidents and vice-chancellors were eager to recognize the quality of every member of the university community, including the faculty and academics, graduate and undergraduate students, staff, administration, and members the administration's governors, regents, or other ruling bodies.

Presidents and vice-chancellors choose which members of their constituency get recognition, and this choice may be constrained by the method of delivery. The audience includes not only those immediate members present, but also those to whom the president or vice-chancellor intends to 'hear' the presentation. By identifying and recognizing individuals, presidents and vice-chancellors enroll them in the membership constituency and validate the individual's significance in the organization. Further, this promotes the individual's membership to the rest of the constituency by identifying iconic successes to which others may aspire, and enlists their collective support to pursue and attain similar successes. While there are differences in how recognition takes place, some of the differentiation is explained by the method of delivery. For annual reports, the recognition is limited but in-depth. For annual addresses, it is more encompassing. In regular letters or messages to the community, the individual addresses may be fewer, but come with greater frequency. In each case, this could be a persuasive form of leadership, with which the president or vice-chancellor identifies and promotes the successes of the community to illustrate that institutional success, indeed the president's or vice-chancellor's personal success, is dependent on the success of the whole.

> For all our initiatives and plans, in the end we owe our progress to the talent, energy, and diverse perspectives of the people who form our community—which is to say, all of you. (Harvard, 2008)

In the United Kingdom, some of the difference between how each university committed to this theme may be explained by the variance in presentation. The vice-chancellors of the universities of Leeds and Newcastle did not give formal annual addresses to their communities, and instead provided recognition through their annual reports. Annual reports depend on highlighting individual successes, pinpointing individual researchers, students, and initiatives to illustrate the breadth of excellence at the university. While these aspirational universities did not formally declare that the university's success was the result of a collaborative effort, the attention paid to each individual facet of the university illustrates the collective success of the institution. Each of their university reports follows a format recognizing the unique activities of the individual institution, including recognition of student successes, teaching accomplishments, research production, and the achievements of university goals. These accomplishments are carefully selected. Thus, there is a page-limit and fewer overall activities are identified than in the elite universities.

As the universities of Leeds and Newcastle identified fewer individual activities, they focused on each selected accomplishment in greater detail than is found in the speeches given at Cambridge and Oxford, or indeed in any of the presentations from U.S. universities. Leeds and Newcastle close their reports with attention to the whole university, recognizing that it is indeed a collaborative effort.

> This has been an extraordinary year for our University. Our new strategic focus has seen the creative power of our staff and students unleashed as never before, as evidenced by unprecedented successes and performance. (Leeds, 2007)

> Our successes as well as our plans are based on the continued commitment of talented and dedicated staff and students, as well as strong support from our alumni, benefactors and friends. From that strong base, we look to the future with confidence. (Newcastle, 2010)

At Cambridge and Oxford, the vice-chancellors gave annual addresses to their communities, and this afforded them a different type of opportunity to recognize collective success, as well as the university's dependence on all sectors of the community for excellence. Again, like the aspirational universities at Leeds and Newcastle, the dominant attention in the presentations was committed to identifying individual efforts and initiatives. These elite universities' vice-chancellors recognized the collaborative efforts of the community through slightly more specific means, but again the dominant voice was of attention to the broad and individual successes that make up the collaborative nature of their endeavors:

> Success is inherently about people, in our case the academic staff and students who by their scholarship have enriched this institution. They are supported by committed and professional staff whose contribution is no less important in serving the needs of scholarship. (Cambridge, 2010)

> Oxford remains among the very best universities in the world—a centre combining outstanding research and outstanding teaching, where the best and brightest staff and students from here in the UK and from all over the globe can develop new understanding and knowledge for the benefit of all. (Oxford, 2010)

By contrast, presidents in the U.S spent far more time attending to the collaborative nature of the institution: "What drives its [Harvard's] progress and sustains its vitality is the collective effort of all of us—faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends" (Harvard, 2007). It may be a feature of the democratic nature of U.S. institutions, or perhaps the democratic expectations of their predominantly U.S. constituency, but each U.S. president paid attention to the community as a community, working together to accomplish their common goal: "I hope that everyone in the MIT community will feel proud of our many successes in the last year" (MIT, 2006); "A university is a community of individuals designed to discover, train, nourish and mentor the future talent that our society will require" (Nebraska, 2008);

> This is our time at Texas. Yours and mine. We're in this together. Everyone here today—and everyone who is a part of this university family worldwide—must contribute to our common goal of becoming the best public university in the country. (Texas, 2006)

> Stony Brook is a great university. It is great because of its faculty, its students, its staff. It is not only an educational institution, it is a community, with a total of 35,000 citizens. It is a community of diversity in race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, academic interests, and talents. It brings together many lives, interwoven, depending in so many ways on one another. (Stony Brook, 2006)

Perhaps the greatest raw variation in how the theme of *success takes a village* is presented comes following the advent of the recession. In the United Kingdom, the economic impact of the recession did not filter to the university in the same ways as in the United States. British elite universities are not as dependent on their market-volatile endowments or tax-sensitive state allocations as are their U.S. peers. *All* U.K.

universities rely on national rather than local/state funds for their budgets (through the HEFCE funding program) which was impacted slower than state budgets.

However, changes in higher education funding were already under way in the United Kingdom at the outset of the time period represented in this sample. Thus, the annual reports from Leeds and Newcastle do not discuss the cost of an education, and Leeds only addresses the implications of changes in HEFCE funding in their 2009 strategic plan: “It is a key priority for us to be able to achieve our vision with a reduction in our dependency on HEFCE funding” (Leeds (SP), 2009b). The vice-chancellors at Cambridge and Oxford were early in discussing the future of higher education financing in their own contexts: “This week the first undergraduate students to pay top-up fees are joining the University” (Oxford, 2006); “The top-up fees regime, along with the concomitant commitment to needs-blind admissions, also sets a structure within which the level of fees can be constructively addressed as we move forward” (Oxford, 2007);

> Public and private sector investment in research is of crucial importance, make no mistake, but it has the effect of making undergraduate education a smaller and smaller piece of university budgets. It is a short step to education receiving a smaller and smaller piece of research-intensive universities' attention. In Britain, the dilemma is compounded by shortfalls in the funding of undergraduate education. (Cambridge, 2006)

> For undergraduates, the challenges have really yet to come, but as we consider the future of fees, government teaching support, and bursaries, we must be alert to the danger of unintended consequences driving our UK undergraduate numbers down. (Cambridge, 2007)

By contrast, in the United States, presidents were quick to ‘share the pain’ and to promote collaborative efforts to face the recession. They began to discuss the sudden and drastic changes in the economic world, assuring their constituencies that not only would they survive the impending difficulties, but also that efforts to address the financial upheaval would be distributed across the university. This attention to collaborative governance was common across all U.S. universities in the sample, but the tenor of the attention differentiated by tier.

> We asked the schools and other units to budget for the current year assuming an 8 percent reduction in dollars distributed from the endowment… Some efforts have been essentially local; others, more institution-wide… Across the university we made significant spending reductions in the course of the past academic year, and our overall financial results show meaningful savings against our original FY09 budget. (Harvard, 2009)

> This means that we will be required to make difficult choices. We will need to decide what is truly necessary to pursue excellence. We can try simply to balance the budget and tread water, or we can make the necessary hard choices and move ahead to provide the very best education for our students and to fulfill our research mission. (Texas, 2009)

> I ask all of you, our faculty, our students, our staff, parents, friends, supporters, legislative leaders, and informed members of the public, to unite together in common cause to renew the promise of our founding, to work to give us the tools to become the great research institution this region and state so desperately needs. Together we can do this, together we will do this. (Stony Brook, 2009)

As is clear from the previous examples, presidents at U.S. universities attended to the challenge by recognizing the talent and opportunity which could be maximized with the full cooperation of the university constituency. At the elite universities, the economic damage of the recession was primarily centered on their endowments: "…when you subtract what we spent from the endowment last year, and add in new gifts, the endowment fell from nearly $37 billion to $26 billion" (Harvard, 2009). Endowment discussions led the university presidents to discuss in great detail how the university would trim costs to offset the impact of lost investment income: "Our challenge is clear: together we must chart a financially prudent path forward, but one that sustains and fosters the essential character of MIT" (MIT, 2008b);

> We will set in place a broad, deliberate, inclusive process, in which all branches of the Institute will work together in the coming year to reassess our priorities and the use of our resources. (MIT, 2008b)

> But in the extraordinary circumstances of last year, it seemed essential that our whole community begin to face the implications of this very important reality… And we've recognized that, in Harvard's decentralized environment, our schools and other units face challenges that differ in both magnitude and kind—and they need flexibility to shape solutions locally. (Harvard, 2009)

The discourse was different at the state universities, which are dependent on public funds for a portion of their operating costs, and have a duty to serve the well-being and needs of the state through economic and academic service. The three U.S. state university presidents in the sample paid homage to the local environment for increased or continued funding through collaborative governance: "To achieve our objectives we must be curious, collaborative, creative and comprehensive" (Nebraska, 2010); "… it is imperative for us to fight for increased State Purpose funding in the future" (Stony Brook, 2008). This attention to collaborative governance is extended through the decision-process, as evidenced by university president's attention to how the university will "weather a perfect storm of reduced state support" (Stony Brook, 2009) through combined sacrifice, increased efficiency, and through reduction in expenses, among other endeavors. The focus of combined efforts was frequently centered on a more dramatic discourse of reinventing the institution and recommitting to the goals of the university as a requirement for survival, almost a belief that 'we *can* get through this', rather than the marked contrast represented by the confident 'we *are* going to get through this' discourse of the elites.

> To put it bluntly, we will have to reinvent how we do things in order to become more efficient and effective, or in economic jargon, to become more productive. (Texas, 2010)

> I hope to engage students, alumni, constituents, and parents, as well as faculty, in pursuing this task. I would propose to name this task force: Pursuing a 2020 Vision: the Task Force on Academic Efficiency. (Nebraska, 2009)

> … we will be required to make difficult choices. We will need to decide what is truly necessary to pursue excellence. We can try simply to balance the budget and tread water, or we can make the necessary hard choices and move ahead to provide the very best education for our students and to fulfill our research mission. In my view, we can't stand still. (Texas, 2009)

> This process with our budgets won't be easy. It won't be quick. It will take a great deal of consultation and discussion among faculty, department chairs, research unit directors, deans, the Provost, and me. It will take dialogue. (Texas, 2009)

Collaboration as a component of the university organization embodies the heart of the *success takes a village* theme. With U.S. institutions dominating the democratic ideals that underscore higher education, they differ in their presentation of how to recognize accomplishment and how to face the challenges of the recession. Presidents at the aspirational U.S. universities focused on reinvention and excellence following the recession, while their elite counterparts focused on the organizational efficiencies achieved through institution-wide efforts and the proper management and recovery of endowment incomes.

In the United Kingdom, the vice-chancellors at aspirational universities were wholly-committed to recognition of the breadth of excellence that made their universities successful. At Cambridge and Oxford the focus was broad, recognizing the accomplishments in less detail than in the presentations of the annual reports from Leeds and Newcastle. In general, the U.K. institutions had a more uniform approach to their institution-wide recognition than the universities in the United States, with the elites differing only in depth of attention—greater at aspirational universities—and breadth—greater at elite universities.

This attention to the breadth or depth illustrates perhaps the greatest differences in how university presidents and vice-chancellors differentiate what they hope to attain by achieving 'success'. Elite universities define success with attention to the entire university, by acknowledging that in every area under the university's purview they are competitive and accomplished. By contrast, aspirational universities focus on those activities for which they are renowned, rather than the entire university. Every member of the university is, in part, responsible for those successes in limited areas, but due to their aspirational status the concept of success is far more limited. The nature of the challenges they face, and the nature of the successes they accomplish are greatly varied. Aspirational universities are pursuing and recognizing discrete successes, while elite universities are pursing and recognizing universal success.

> We have also had some conspicuous successes in attracting funding to establish major research centres, such as the Centre for Biopharmaceutical Process Development, the Digital Economy Research Hub, the Clinical Ageing Research Unit and the Newcastle cancer centre. (Newcastle, 2010)

> What drives its [Harvard's] progress and sustains its vitality is the collective effort of all of us – faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends. No community I know holds greater potential to shape the world of ideas and contribute to improving the human condition. And one of my paramount hopes for the coming years is that, more and more, when all of us at Harvard think and talk about our endeavors, we will be describing not just an accumulation of discrete individual pursuits, but the efforts of people in different parts of the University working actively toward common ends. (Harvard, 2007)

Finally, the recession marked a differentiation period in the discourse for the universities in the United States, though not in the U.K.. The vice-chancellors in the United Kingdom did not fundamentally alter their narrative in the as did their U.S.

counterparts. U.S. presidents focused quickly on the collaborative efforts necessary to survive and thrive following the recession, with elite presidents focusing on the endowment and expertise at the university, while the aspirational university presidents focused on greater efficiency and reinvention to maintain their status and serve their institutional mission.

We are world class

> In return, we ask that you begin by asking today … how you can embody our informal motto, "Princeton in the nation's service and in the service of all nations." (Princeton, 2006)

> We should heed the observations that Jeff Raikes, CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, made in last year's commencement address: "Nebraska may not be a big place, but Nebraskans can do big things. . . . Nebraska can change the world." We should have no less an ambition. (Nebraska, 2010)

The *world-class* nature of these statements is primarily delimited by tier, rather than over time. Elite universities define their world-class status using a different level of global engagement than their aspirational counterparts. As is evident from the examples above, Princeton views its place as *in* the world, but guiding the world. Nebraska views its place in the world as a *part* of the world, with influence. While subtle, the difference is powerful, and will be illustrated in greater detail in this section. Also, there are some very important country-variations in how the concept of *world class* is defined. This section will rely primarily on the tier-differences in the narrative, and roll in the differences by country as a component within the primary analysis by tier.

Each university in the sample is arguably a world-class institution, ranked by the various metrics in the top echelon of universities, and provides for a great percentage of research production. However, how each president and vice-chancellor illustrates the concept of *world class* is defined differently at each type of university. Every president and vice-chancellor cites the world-class accomplishments, discusses how their institutions are changing the world, and why higher education is the best investment in the future. But the scope of these arguments is varied among the institutions in the sample. This section analyzes how the presidents and vice-chancellors present their university in a world-class context, and further delves into variance by the differentiating features of time, location, and tier. Again, the primary differences of tier are captured in the excerpts, above, illustrating that elite-tier universities view their world class role as leaders guiding and serving the world, while aspirational-tier universities view their world class role as members of the world, serving global needs, but doing so as a component of the world rather than the driving force. Elite universities envision themselves at the head of the higher education snake. While the aspirational universities are functionally important to the snake's movement, their control in guiding the direction is envisioned as less primary.

In their annual addresses, reports, and strategic plans, presidents and vice-chancellors generally do not call their institutions 'world-class' in direct terms. Broadly speaking, they ensure they are recognizing the university's activities around the world, its groundbreaking research, and the cosmopolitan nature of the constituency. Each of these types of recognition places the university in a global position, classifying the activities and endeavors of the university as either among the best in the world or of significance to the world. While some of this may counter Salmi's (2009) definition of world-class universities as dependent on high levels of resources, talent, and governance, I propose that understanding the actual language and presentations of presidents and vice-chancellors gives us a window into how university leadership addresses the concept of *world-class* in their individual university context and adds to the understanding gleaned from prior research.

> It is easy to lose sight of just how international Oxford has become. I know from my own experience working in the United States, that many universities in North America have developed internationalisation programmes. By contrast, Oxford seems to be international in its very fabric. (Oxford, 2010)

Elite universities in the United Kingdom focus their conception of world-class status on the longevity of their dominance as a global brand: "Over the centuries, with startling frequency, Cambridge academics and their students have changed the world through their ideas and work" (Cambridge, 2007); "Oxford scholars, across the canon, are among the most respected by their global peers" (Oxford, 2008). Further, this global dominance provides the institution with advantages in recruiting and positions the university on a global scale:

> …it is clear that we at Oxford are in a highly favoured position compared to scholars and students in some other parts of the world… Oxford's magnetic pull on academic talent from throughout the world… is perhaps one of the less remarked benefits of our increasingly global reach. (Oxford, 2007)

This attention to the global awareness of their institutions is mirrored by Harvard, which focuses on its position as a world-leader in higher education, on the forefront of influence:

> And we need to engage the world, locally and globally—as responsible citizens committed to public purposes, as students and scholars ready to help solve complex problems with rigor and imagination, as people who live by the ethical standards we teach, as individuals who repay the privilege of being in a rare place like this by using our knowledge to help advance the well-being of people in the world beyond our walls. (Harvard, 2009)

Indeed, this interest in how the university attends to the needs of the world illustrates the institutional concept of what the *world* is. Each university in the sample discussed preparing their students for leadership roles, and to serve the needs of the world. In the elite universities, though, the concept of leadership is couched in much more global terms. For instance, MIT is focused on how their graduates will ultimately work at the highest levels on a global scale:

> The center will provide fellowship support for aspiring entrepreneurs to spend two years at MIT acquiring the knowledge and skills required for successful business development and civic leadership in developing nations around the world. (MIT, 2007b)

Cambridge is similar in its attention the role of shaping a global future:

> What Cambridge does well, and must keep doing, is respond to change in the world and help shape and lead it… As global solutions are sought for global

> problems, we must be ready to play a leading role in international collaborations. (Cambridge, 2007)

Indeed, no institution embodies this attention the global impact of their work in quite so specific terms as Princeton, which envisions its institutional mission as one of global service, embodied in their informal motto: “Princeton in the nation’s service and in the service of all nations” (Princeton, 2006);

> This call to active engagement with public affairs goes to the heart of our informal motto, "Princeton in the nation's service and in the service of all nations," and should be a defining feature of your time on this campus. If your education is not directed outward in the service of society, it will be an egocentric and ultimately arid exercise. (Princeton, 2008);

> This motto reflects an abiding conviction that the privilege of a Princeton education brings with it a lifelong responsibility to work on behalf of those less fortunate, and there is no better time to exercise that responsibility than right now. (Princeton, 2009)

> I am certain that some of you will use the law to protect the rights of individuals, possibly even joining the three Princetonians who currently sit on the Supreme Court, and I fully expect that there will be those who will follow in the footsteps of James Madison, Class of 1771, and Woodrow Wilson, Class of 1879, in public service to the nation and all nations. (Princeton, 2010)

While each of the elite universities promotes the concept of national service, this is done in a way that further promotes the international and global nature of such service. Princeton’s focus on service to all nations illustrates that the leaders being prepared at the elite institutions may go on to positions of authority in their own countries, but they are expected to do so as a function of making the entire world a better place. The scope of service and leadership is not constrained to the local, to merely the national or regional. Elite universities thus define their reach and impact as global. This may be a cultural difference, a remnant of British colonialism and its attendant concepts of empire, while the U.S. attempts to avoid colonial ties and terminology.

Princeton's approach to service also embodies the difference between how elite U.S. and U.K. universities address their position in the world. The U.S. elites frame their international impact as one of service, outreach, and leadership. The U.K. elites promote a more imperial view of their global impact, addressing their *dominance* of international affairs. Further, U.K. elites promote their longevity and historic cosmopolitan nature as primary components of their very nature, as unique features of their international prestige and bearing.

By comparison, U.S. universities in the aspirational tier continue this expectation of preparing leaders, but do so in a less cosmopolitan manner. "Our professional schools train this state's future leaders" (Nebraska, 2006). These institutions are more constrained in their conceptual definition of developing the world's leaders, and usually focus on issues specific to their state: "Our economic development responsibilities through research, educating the leaders of the future, and providing world-class health care to the citizens of Suffolk County are more important than ever" (Stony Brook, 2007); "…we are educating the next generation of scientists and business leaders" (Stony Brook, 2008). As is evidenced by Stony Brook's attention to issues in the immediate community, the concept of 'world-class' is limited to the university's immediate vicinity. This is echoed at Nebraska and at Texas, with special attention to their production of state leaders: "Undergraduate education is our top priority as we develop the talent and produce the leaders this state and our country require" (Nebraska, 2010); "In 2025, will Texans look back to our generation and say that we helped build the foundation for leadership and innovation that push their generations forward?" (Texas, 2008).

> Moreover, we cannot profess to be the great public university unless we educate a diverse group of leaders to guide Texas and the nation into the future. Texas gains strength from our diverse population, from our diverse leaders, and from our border with Mexico. (Texas, 2006)

Aspirational universities in the United Kingdom barely discuss the outcome of their students becoming leaders, with the exception of the two quotes below. However, they do similarly attend to the idea of addressing issues in a relatively local context. Some of this may be due to the demand for attention and space-limitations in the annual report, which is dependent on numbers and measurable accomplishments. This is illustrated by Newcastle's sole attention to the idea of leadership, through a corporate relationship: "Customers of the North Leadership Centre at Newcastle University include the oil company Saudi Aramco, which in 2010 sent 18 female trainees to a summer school in leadership and management" (Newcastle, 2011). It is unclear whether these trainees were formally students of Newcastle, but the outreach component to meet international needs reflects a global awareness of the university's impact. At Leeds, the attention was couched in similarly nebulous terms as was found at the other aspirational universities: "Our stakeholders—including our staff, students, alumni, external sponsors and partners—expect the University of Leeds to… produce exceptional graduates who become the leaders of tomorrow" (Leeds, 2009a).

As may be clear from these excerpts, the undergraduate-centric nature of the aspirational universities has an impact on the presented conceptualization of the university's world-class nature. In the U.S., the institutional constituency is state-based, drawing from within the political boundaries that also constrain their state funding. Each aspirational school is a public institution, and while Stony Brook prides itself on its increased selectivity—"Ten years ago we admitted 58 percent of the applicants; last year we admitted 51 percent; this year it was 48 percent" (Stony Brook, 2006)—the percentage of admitted students at the aspirational universities is not nearly as competitive as at the elite universities: "For the first time, applications to Harvard College surpassed 30,000, for approximately 1,650 places in the entering class" (Harvard, 2010); "A record 69% (1,069) of the 12.3% of students admitted chose to enroll" (MIT, 2007b). Further, the size of the U.S. aspirational universities further diminishes the broadly international nature of the student body, with MIT admitting just over 1,000 undergraduate students in 2007 as evidenced in the above example, the 48% of admitted students at Stony Brook is from an applicant pool of 21,000 (Stony Brook, 2006), reflecting the size of aspirational universities' freshman classes as larger than their elite counterparts by a factor of ten.

Admitted students are one component of the cosmopolitan nature of the university. With elite universities, the size of the incoming class enhances the international nature of the student body. At Princeton, the president is consistent in recognizing the cosmopolitan nature of the student body, citing that the freshman "hail from 46 countries and 47 states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico" (Princeton, 2008), and the graduate student body is a "strikingly cosmopolitan one, as 40 percent of you are citizens of other countries, proof positive that Princeton is truly an international university" (Princeton, 2009). Other presidents and vice-chancellors continue this attention, highlighting their success in international recruiting in an increasingly competitive international environment: "The new class also reflects great international diversity, hailing from 58 countries" (MIT, 2007b); "The recruitment of graduate students is intensely internationally competitive, and increasingly so" (Oxford, 2007); "Postgraduate education is a growth area for all leading international universities and Cambridge is no exception" (Cambridge, 2010).

To a lesser extent, in part due to differences in institutional size, the aspirational universities also attend to the cosmopolitan nature of the constituency. Leeds pays close attention to its international attractiveness: "With 3,650 international fee paying students, over 800 European students and around 700 other non-UK students on short courses our total international student population exceeds 5,000" (Leeds, 2007); "…this year's entering class is the most diverse in history with higher numbers of both students of color and international students" (Nebraska, 2009); "Overseas student numbers rose significantly in the 2009–10 academic year, with more than 100 countries represented in the student population" (Newcastle, 2010).

> Stony Brook has long been an international university. We were among the first to partner with Chinese universities, and we continue today to attract some of the best international students in the world to our campus. Students from 105

> countries are here, and they add greatly to our academic and campus life. (Stony Brook, 2009)

While aspirational universities were concerned about the international nature of their community, they were also invested in international activities. Presidents and vice-chancellors were sure to highlight international collaborations and endeavors, such as Stony Brook's partnership with Chinese universities. Further exhibition of the university's international activities includes highlighting branch campuses, extension programs, and international research initiatives. Again, aspirational universities were quick to promote their engagement. Newcastle developed two branch campuses, in Malaysia and Singapore in an attempt to widen "access to affordable education, benefiting society and extending its global influence" (Newcastle, 2010). Just as they could not recognize every endeavor and success, presidents and vice-chancellors were limited in their ability to attend to the international engagements of the university. They took care to select token examples of the increasingly global nature of the university. Leeds did not promote a branch campus, but was sure to attend to the benefits of its international engagement:

> We continue to play a leading role in the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) which addresses major issues through its global challenge programme. Alongside WUN we are engaged in several other select international partnerships, including the White Rose Health Innovation Partnership which has led to links with institutions in Singapore and King Saud University in Saudi Arabia. We have established an innovative partnership with the University of

> Copenhagen—ranked among the world's top 50 universities—creating new opportunities in research, teaching and leadership. (Leeds (SP), 2009b)

> Stony Brook is an absolute powerhouse in African paleontological and other scientific studies. Our Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya, headed by Richard, Meave, and Louise Leakey; the outstanding paleoanthropological work that Fred Grine and his team are doing in South Africa; our ValBio rain forest campus in Madagascar, headed by MacArthur genius and lemur expert Patricia Wright; and our fossil field site also in Madagascar, run by David Krause, which is amazingly rich in unique cannibalistic dinosaurs, grass-eating crocodiles, and even a mystery mammal; are all world-class research sites in which our faculty make news and our students participate. And that is just a sampling. (Stony Brook, 2008)

> In so many ways, this university has become a player in the global marketplace of higher education. Our most visible initiatives may be in China where we now have partnership degree programs with two universities, growing research relationships, and, here in Lincoln, the Confucius Institute, which is developing significant programs to help foster Nebraskans' understanding of Chinese language and culture. (Nebraska, 2008)

International engagement is frequently coupled with research. Aspirational universities identified specific research programs that had global implications. A clear feature of the aspirational universities is the depth of specific programs. Newcastle admits that it is limited, and that it "would be counterproductive to dilute our efforts by spreading our work too thinly" (Newcastle (SP), 2012). Thus, Newcastle intends to focus its research efforts on being world-leading in only a few areas—ageing, social renewal, and sustainability—defined as “Societal Challenge Themes” (Newcastle (SP), 2012). Nebraska echoes this commitment to excellence in individual areas, specifically in the life sciences, which is the dominant focus for most of their research activity:

> Any objective observer would conclude that this university must excel in the life sciences. The Nebraska economy is built on feeding the world, and now, more than ever, fueling its activities. (Nebraska, 2008)

Texas focused on history and English as centers of excellence. Each was recognized as an elite program on the national stage, and thus deserving of continued or increased investment: “In 2006 and 2007, I announced that we were funding new initiatives in the Departments of History and English” (Texas, 2008). Other attention was paid to computer science, as “Allen Emerson in Computer Sciences won the A.W. Turing Award, the most prestigious award in computing” (Texas, 2008) and the university “invested in the Lonestar and the Ranger supercomputers, [making] our research scientists more effective” (Texas, 2010). Stony Brook promoted its unique status as a center of energy research, and its continued collaboration with Brookhaven National Laboratory, to focus on “pioneering research in imaging, nuclear physics, energy, nanotechnology, and the upcoming new second-generation National Synchrotron Light Source” (Stony Brook, 2009).

Leeds is somewhat unique among the aspirational universities, in their annual report avoided identifying specific centers of excellence. This approach mirrors that of the elite universities, which were broadly committed to the idea that their research had far-ranging, world-class impact. Indeed, the entire tenor of the elite universities’ approach to their global impact is that they had both breadth and depth. Whereas the aspirational universities identified individual areas where their research was “world-leading or internationally excellent” (Newcastle, 2011), elite universities made no such distinction, claiming that *all* areas of attention were globally significant. Cambridge claimed that “The byword for all that we do now and will continue to do in the future is 'excellence' and that excellence has to be measured by international not national standards” (Cambridge, 2010) in an attempt to illustrate the breadth of depth Cambridge enjoys. Oxford promoted its structural philosophy that excellence is imperative in all facets of the university’s endeavors:

> …we reaffirmed our commitment to our primary values: academic freedom, collegiality, subsidiarity, disciplinary diversity, and parity of esteem among disciplines and between teaching and research. These are the values that sustain the University as its members pursue excellence in their contributions to society, in maintaining the quality of students and new staff, and in the provision of facilities and services. And it is these values that sustain the University as it responds and adapts to the numerous pressing demands of this society and the wider world. (Oxford, 2006)

In the United States, presidents at the elite universities presented similar approaches to the breadth of their academic endeavors, coupled with the depth of their expertise. “Deep expertise in multiple disciplines, combined with a desire and drive to collaborate, are hallmarks of MIT” (MIT, 2007b). This approach represents the elite institutions’ commitment to the pursuit of excellence in all fields, not just a focus on the few that are already successful. Princeton makes note of the breadth of its liberal arts education, taught by professors “whose distinguished scholarly achievements and dedication to teaching in dozens of disciplines are certain to enhance Princeton's reputation for excellence in research and in undergraduate and graduate education" (Princeton, 2008). Harvard promotes its very structure on the expectation that all members of the community thrive on excellence and the depth of their expertise:

> Harvard is a university with an unsurpassed collection of strengths. Look around the university—look around at the people in this room—and you'll find a wealth and breadth of talent and imagination and experience that would be hard to match anywhere else. (Harvard, 2009)

Thus, it should be clear that presidents and vice-chancellors define the position of their institutions as world-class using different conceptions of the term. Broadly speaking, aspirational universities conceptualize *world class* as dependent upon the cosmopolitan nature of their community (mostly in regard to students) and the excellence of their star programs. They focus on world-leading research in a few areas, and promote the international nature of their student body and the few engaging activities the university has undertaken. Further, they prepare students for leadership, but not at a world-leading, global level. Instead, the aspirational universities are constrained by their political governance, tied to the states (in the U.S.) or regions (in the U.K.) they serve. Texas must prepare students to be leaders *in Texas*. Newcastle must ensure the prosperity and future of North East England. Stony Brook is concerned about the well being of Long Island and New York State.

Meanwhile, the elite universities are promoting their cosmopolitan nature, their research excellence, and their global impact. Additionally, though, they are doing these things with a broader conceptualization of where and how their impact filters into the world at large. None of the elite universities is constrained by geography, for example, with Cambridge and Oxford concerned about how Great Britain, Europe, and how the world will be improved by their endeavors. However, the different tiers do have different reference groups. The elite universities recruit a larger, more significant portion of their community from a global pool. Texas speaks of competing with western universities: "UCLA and Berkeley are still far ahead of UT Austin in budget and financial resources" (Texas, 2010). At the same time, Oxford is concerned with more global competition: "we seriously lag behind our major US competitors and, in addition, now face increasing competition from leading Swiss and German institutions" (Oxford, 2007).

This illustrates that each of the universities in the sample promote themselves as world-class research institutions, the very concept of *world-class* is different at each university. There is some similarity among close universities—Oxford and Cambridge share a global perception of the concept, while Texas and Nebraska share a less global, more nation-centric view of their position. Private U.S. universities pride themselves on being globally engaged, globally respected, and globally renowned for their research and demand. The aspirational universities in the United Kingdom are interested in defining their global impact by serving an international clientele of students and promoting international collaborations and branch campuses. Public universities in the U.S. are constrained to their geography region, with international research activities centered in a few lucrative areas. Beyond those typical similarities, the unique nature of each university is reflected in the differentiation of its global presentation.

As the tier-differences are striking, it illustrates the Reisman (1958) conception of the snakelike progression in higher education. The elite school view themselves as leading the way, driving the field, and responsible for world-class expectations. Universities in the aspirational tier follow that lead, but do so by redefining in their own terms what it means to be internationally engaged, what it means to be a world-class university. At another level, the Atlantic divide between the two geographic groups of universities manifests through a differentiation of language. Both national groups are divided by a common language, defining their futures with different meanings.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Introduction

In *Official Narratives of Status and Strategy in World Class Institutions: Beyond Isomorphism*, I examined the discourse presented by the presidents and vice-chancellors of major research universities in the United Kingdom and the United States. I utilized the official university discourse of leaders to explore the manner in which they identified and recognized institutional activities, as well as to navigate the language they use to identify their institutional mission. The discourse also revealed broad themes common to world-class research universities, and investigated the differences in how those themes were presented by institutional tier, location, and over time. At the center of the study is the concept of world-class universities, and the long-standing observation about imitation in higher education systems, within and across nations.

This project was about institutional theory and isomorphism, and those concepts' insufficient ability to explain behaviors in universities. Institutional theory argues that behavior at a leading university should lead the field, driving the behavior at universities behind it. This may be likened to a train, with each following institution trundling along on the same tracks. However, this project supports a different metaphor—the concept of snakelike procession (Reisman, 1958)—wherein the leading institutions are the head of the snake, carving their path. The difference is in what comes behind, with the 'following' institutions taking different routes that mimic only the institutions in their immediate vicinity, with no clear indication of overall direction. Traditional institutional theory argues that, whether by design or by accident, leading universities act as models, targets for mimicry in the field of higher education. This project found that those institutions ‘behind’ the leaders often take a different path, perhaps in pursuit of a different, distinct goal.

In exploring the extent to which and how isomorphic patterns manifested in the discursive mimicry of official university leaders, I examined official public discourse at leading, world-class research universities over a period of five academic years, 2006–2010. *Official public discourse* was captured by collecting state of the university addresses, annual reports, letters to the community, and other annual presentations given by the president or vice-chancellor. University strategic plans were also sampled, although the ten universities in the sample did not uniformly produce strategic plans, with comparable documents found at half of the institutions. Ten universities were sampled, from the United Kingdom and the United States. These were coupled into two tier-groups. The ‘elite’ tier comprised Cambridge and Oxford, in the United Kingdom, and Harvard, MIT, and Princeton, in the United States. The second tier comprised Leeds and Newcastle in the U.K., and the U.S. universities of Nebraska, Stony Brook, and Texas. Each of these ten universities is arguably a world-class institution, a member of its leading national research group (the Russell Group in the U.K. and the Association of American Universities (AAU) in the U.S.) during the sampled timeframe, and increasingly competes on a global scale for researchers, funding and grants, and students.

World-class universities have been the subject of numerous studies, especially in the context of developing universities or university systems. Salmi (2009) collected data on world class universities in order to identify the features that made an institution world-class, arguing that three forces combine to enable a university to attain that moniker:

abundant resources, concentration of talent, and favorable governance. This project relied on those categories to focus the commentary found in the various official sources, in order to detect how universities spoke to the status of the institution. The timeframe, 2006–2010, was purposefully chosen to illustrate whether the advent of the 2008 recession—an outside force causing stress in the field of higher education—would be followed by isomorphism among the leaders in research-intensive higher education. The institutional sample allows for further analysis of institutional difference between the tiers, as well as between universities in the United Kingdom and the United States. Given five years of data, collected in nearly 60 public speeches by presidents and vice-chancellors, formal university reports, and strategic plans, it should be possible to detect the narrative of status present in world-class higher education.

The institutional sample was purposefully selected to provide a window into the narrow band of world-class research universities. Each selected institution was, at the time of the study, a member of either the Russell Group (in the U.K.) or the Association of American Universities (AAU, in the U.S.). These groups represent the leading institutions by research-production and research-expenditures. The institutions in these research groups are responsible for a significant portion of each nation’s market for scientific discover and knowledge-production. The sample identifies a small subset of the broad field of higher education. By providing only a slice of the hyper-stratified field of higher education, the analysis is more focused and nuanced than is generally found in institutional literature. Attenuating the research to a narrow band of the universities, institutions which should otherwise exhibit greater homogeny due to their global similarity, resulted in a unique look at the discursive context and resulting differences within even a tightly-related subset of the institutional field.

Thus, the project drove to answer the question: What narratives of status are present in world-class, research universities? Further analyses at the level of nation, tier, and before/after the recession enabled me to address various dimensions and considerations that might affect the extent to which and the way in which isomorphic mimicry plays out in discourse about world class universities. It might be said that comparing these ten universities is like comparing apples and oranges. However, I propose that while there are structural, fiscal, and environmental differences between each of the universities in the sample, these institutions each represent world-class higher education. Some differences may be self-evident: Harvard is not *like* Nebraska; Oxford is not *like* Newcastle. But they are all alike in their mission to further knowledge through competitive scientific research, to educate, to promote the well-being of their communities. Each university in the sample is an international leader in some field, if not more than one field. Each university thrives on the accomplishments of faculty and students, survives on tuition, grant, and other forms of fiscal support, and is driven by a common pursuit of knowledge. Whereas the differences may be many, the similarities are also numerous, justifying their inclusion in the field of world-class research-intensive higher education.

In higher education, the institutional theory is frequently applied to universities with a broader definition of similarity than this project. The ‘field’ of analysis is restricted to comparisons within the group of U.S. research universities or other components of the Carnegie classification (Dey, Milem, and Berger, 1997), U.S. liberal arts universities (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Kraatz, Ventresca, & Deng, 2010), or even the impact of globalization on broad higher education (Vaira, 2004). Other comparative approaches couple liberal arts universities to doctoral institutions (Bourke, Bray, & Horton, 2009). In the face of traditional attention to the field of higher education, we may be in an age of increasing diversity in higher education, and that traditional categorization of institutions within the field may be changing (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). This project embraces the idea that institutional theory, as traditionally applied, may not be as applicable to the study of higher education as it once was. I promote narrower distinctions within the field, and provide analysis based on more finely grained institutional categories than presented in the past.

Summary of the study

If world-class universities are, indeed, following the leaders in the field, the activities represented in the official discourse should proclaim successes in similar areas, and thus promote certain activities as field-level uniform accomplishments. However, the data collected from these universities represents neither a uniform presentation of what counts as institutional successes, nor a common presentation of what presidents and vice-chancellors present as important, valuable, and ideal accomplishments. Instead, the universities in the sample show great differentiation in what accomplishments are recognized by the president or vice-chancellor. Instead of a field where the elite universities set the pace for activities, with their aspirational counterparts following accordingly, the universities in this sample illustrate that the recognized accomplishments are differentiated by tier, country, and to a somewhat lesser extent by time.

Salmi's (2009) categorical definition of world-class universities identifies three features common to each institution in the sample: abundant resources, concentration of talent, and favorable governance. While a tripartite definition may imply that the three features may be in balance, that assumption is not defended in the data. Presidents and vice-chancellors recognize abundant resources and concentration of talent more frequently than they recognize favorable governance. Further, when discussing favorable governance, presidents and vice-chancellors generally avoid attending to the political environment in which the university resides, as Salmi (2009) intended with the *favorable governance* category. Instead, they promote self-congratulatory attention to accomplishments of institutional governance. They do so by identifying successful administrative endeavors that further the mission of the university rather than a supportive political environment. This *institutional management* represents over 80% of all forms of governance addressed by presidents and vice-chancellors.

Broadly, the recession was not followed by a change in focus by the presidents and vice-chancellors. Within groups, however, there were recognizable differences over time. Universities in the U.S. were more likely to concentrate on the talent of their community than their counterparts in the U.K., which were more likely to attend to their abundant resources. Comparing university tiers revealed that elite universities were more likely to focus on abundant resources than their aspirational counterparts, who were more focused on favorable governance. Aspirational universities strived to survive in the new economic environment, whereas the elite universities merely recognized the difficulties they faced and acted assured of their success. Tier-differences reflect that beyond the normative forces pushing the university, these institutional groups exist in functionally different fiscal environments which apply unique pressures. Their resources and income streams are different, such that their discourse must reflect these differences. Given the basis of institutional theory, one would argue that aspirational universities should have been focusing on the same accomplishments as their elite counterparts. However, what these data reveal is that at this broad level, world-class research universities vary greatly in what their presidents and vice-chancellors recognize as recognizable accomplishments and goals.

In order to further investigate these differences, I identified the context and subject of each categorical statement. Each statement was further analyzed to determine what component of the category was the target of the statement, and subcategories were developed directly from the parent categories. This section aims to further illustrate that the categories themselves, and the subcategories recognized within them represent further differentiation in how presidents and vice-chancellors address the status of their universities.

Subcategorical Analysis

Abundant Resources

Presidents and vice-chancellors at elite institutions were more likely than their aspirational counterparts to focus on the abundant resources that made their universities successful. However, regardless of institutional tier, the presidents and vice-chancellors did not say “we have abundant resources”. Instead, they focused on three areas that provided resourceful support for the institution: alumni (as ambassadors for the global brand and a source of support for current and future students), funding (through grants, tuition, philanthropy, and other sources), and the physical plant (through the construction and improvement of facilities, as well as the extant buildings and resources available to the community). These three subcategories were found to illustrate further differentiation in what presidents and vice-chancellors represented.

Alumni were promoted, specifically as brand ambassadors and examples of successes for which the university could take some credit. However, this was most common in the United Kingdom, and there represented only 10% of the total attention to resources. Another clear difference is that aspirational universities are more prone to focus on their physical campus than their elite counterparts. Universities in the U.S. were more prone to focus on building projects and the quality of the physical plant than their U.K. counterparts, but this may be explained by a post-recession increase in building due to federal funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). ARRA provided a great deal of income to U.S. universities for build-ready capital projects, in hopes of spurring the economy through construction. Thus, U.S. universities saw a sudden windfall of construction projects being during the time frame sampled.

Instead, presidents and vice-chancellors focused on fiscal matters, specifically grant and research income. This should not be surprising given the research-intensive nature of all the universities in the sample. Over half of all statements addressing abundant resources were of a financial nature. Again, universities in the U.K. were more likely to focus on resources than their U.S. counterparts, and elite universities outpaced their aspirational counterparts by a large margin. Some of this may be self-evident, given that elite universities enjoy far-greater endowments and may owe their elite status to successful grant-funding operations. However, U.K. universities, which are funded by the government and lack the endowments at their U.S. counterparts, focus on financial matters to a greater extent, which is the opposite of what one might have otherwise expected given the isomorphic nature of elite higher education. Surprisingly, there was little change in the discussion of fiscal resources following the advent of the recession.

Concentration of Talent

Research universities depend on the knowledge-production of their faculty and graduate students. Each university in the sample is a dominant research institution, and due to their membership in their respective national research associations, are responsible for a significant portion of research at the national scale. Thus, it should be no surprise that presidents and vice-chancellors recognized the performance of faculty and researchers more than any other part of the university constituency. This did not vary following the recession, but aspirational universities were more likely to promote the quality of their faculty than their elite counterparts. However, recognition of graduate students was dominated by recognition of the undergraduate students at the university. Each university in the sample paid more attention to the quality of incoming undergraduate students than it did to the research-producing graduate student body. Some universities were more likely to recognize graduate student accomplishments, especially those at elite universities who did so ten times as frequently as their aspirational counterparts.

I find it especially interesting that research-intensive universities, dependent on their graduate students for production of knowledge, were not prone to recognizing this constituent group's accomplishments. Instead, the attention paid to incoming undergraduates was promoted. This may be due to the format of international rankings, which considers undergraduate quality more than (if not to the exclusion of) graduate students. Further, elite universities are generally top-heavy, with far smaller undergraduate student bodies than their aspirational peers. Thus, while their research-status depends on the quality of graduate students to support their outstanding faculty, the competitive nature of higher education requires that aspirational universities improve their incoming undergraduate classes in order to improve.

Favorable Governance

The final area Salmi (2009) identified as a primary component of a world-class university was *favorable governance*. Unlike how the category was intended, presidents and vice-chancellors generally did not focus on the political environment in which their institutions operate. Instead, over 80% of their governance attention was spent on institutional management endeavors. The U.K. and the U.S. were equal in their attention to these matters, and the recession was followed by a slight dip in overall attention. Elite universities were more likely to discuss management endeavors than their aspirational counterparts, while aspirational universities paid more attention to the political environment. Indeed, statements that addressed the political governance at the local and state (U.S.) or county (U.K.) level were dominated by aspirational universities. Further, these politically-entrenched statements were predominantly from U.S. institutions. The U.S. aspirational universities in the sample are uniformly state-supported, such that their operating budgets are dependent on the political environment and their relationships with state legislatures.

The final area of attention for issues of governance was also the smallest: national governance (U.S. or U.K.) and regional governance (North American or European). Indeed, Cambridge was the dominant university to recognize that they exist in a greater political environment than their immediate surroundings. Further, the difference between the region in which universities in the U.K. operate and the region in which U.S. universities operate is great. Whereas U.S. institutions tended to be more insular and focus not far beyond their immediate neighborhood, each U.K. universities was concerned about its place in the national system, and how it behaved in the global context. Indeed, the very conception of *global* seems to be different between universities in the U.K. and the U.S.

Narrative Analysis

Beyond the categorical and subcategorical differences, it is important to get a sense of the broad narratives presented by these presidents and vice-chancellors. A second phase of analysis ignored Salmi's (2009) categories of world-class university behaviors. Instead, I followed Slaughter (1993) in close-reading and identifying broad thematic narratives represented across the official discourse. This process revealed two dominant narratives and addressed the variances in how those narratives were presented: *Success takes a village;* and*, we are world class*.

Success takes a village

Each university is a community, and the presidents and vice-chancellors were uniform in sharing and shaping this conception of institutional constituency. The institutional constituency comprises faculty, staff, administration, students, governing bodies, and the community in which the university resides. This theme addresses the breadth of activities at the university, and how each component is responsible for attention to excellence, in an endeavor to accomplish great things. Presidents and vice-chancellors attended to this theme in different ways, but each paid homage to the community as the source of the university's world-class success. At times the attention was constrained by method of delivery and intended audience, as was found at Leeds and Newcastle. But broadly speaking, members of the present or intended audience(s) were singled out to illustrate the breadth of the community, and the community's dependence on a wide distribution of excellence.

In the United Kingdom, vice-chancellors were split by tier. At Newcastle and Leeds, their attention was driven by research accomplishments, student awards, and institutional quality. At Cambridge and Oxford, individuals of all stripes were singularly identified as successes, and the Vice-Chancellors were sure to recognize members of every institutional constituency. Compared to the presidents of U.S. universities, British vice-chancellors were subtler in attending to the democratic, collegiate nature of the university. U.S. presidents were straightforward, calling for collaborative governance, recognizing that the institution's success depended on the people at the university, and continually committing to shared governance. Indeed, attention to this shared-governance function was increased following the recession, as U.S. universities struggled to make sense of the future and in charting the institution's course.

The concept of community was further differentiated by institutional responses to the recession. While the recession did not immediately manifest in the presentations of vice-chancellors in the U.K., attention to university plans for facing the impact of the recession was a dominant component of the narrative theme in the U.S. Elite universities were more concerned with the recession's impact on the university's endowment, such that their collaborative approach was focused on facing the impending cuts from investment return. Elite universities focused on trimming costs, usually institution-wide.

Thus, the *village* was required to pull together to increase efficiencies and tighten belts, but there was a constant underlying tone of implied success in these endeavors. To this end, elite universities addressed the recession with confidence.

By contrast, U.S. aspirational universities receive a dominant portion of their income from state subsidy rather than endowment investments. The presidents called for greater collaboration to improve services, fight for continued state support, and ultimately to reinvent the university to better meet the mission. While this continues the efficiency-focus found at other universities, the aspirational *village* was expected to help redefine how the university pursued the institutional mission in light of waning state support, and to continue working to prove to the political and social constituencies for continued support—especially as an innovator and economic engine. Whereas their elite counterparts approached the discussion of their status in response to the recession as one of confidence, the aspirational universities approached it in more dire terms, with the necessity of survival looming and their confidence attenuated by uncertainty of their futures.

The thematic concept of success means something different at each institution. As a theme, the idea of success taking a village meant that getting through the tough economic times (at elite universities) or surviving the impending economic catastrophe (at aspirational universities) would require the coordinated efforts of each member of the constituency. Each president or vice-chancellor defines success in institutionally specific terms, working to persuade their entire academic community into a unified body working towards the goals of the institution. Indeed, they promote the idea that in order for anyone to be successful, including themselves as leaders, requires the success of others.

We are world class

The final thematic narrative I identified in the discourse illustrates the differentiation of how presidents and vice-chancellors envision their institution's position in the global market. Again, there was a notable difference between the world-class philosophies or elite institutions and that of aspirational universities. Predominantly, elite universities view their role as one of leading the world. Elite universities claim to be responsible for influencing national government, the national conversation, and global well-being. Indeed their very mentality is not as nation-building institutions as may be found in other parts of the world, but *world-building* institutions.

On the other hand, aspirational universities pursue an agenda of promoting the state agenda, and when they pursue regional aspirations they do not stretch far beyond the state, in the U.S., or the county, in the U.K.. "World-Class" for elite universities means they are pursuing activities that global impact. While Leeds and Newcastle pursued agendas that would better humanity around the world, due to their aspirational status they contrasted this with the immediate impact on the university community and neighborhood. The elite universities spoke of activities on every continent, improving the human condition from a universal standpoint, and even of competing with each other at a global level. Elite universities are not *in* the world, they *are* the world.

By contrast, the aspirational universities, especially in the United States, focused on how their work and research would improve the immediate community. The mentality of aspirational universities is that they are flagship universities, economy-driving institutions, but do things at no larger than a regional scale. Nebraska works to improve global food supply, but does so through education and outreach in the U.S. farm belt.

Texas aspires to be the best public university in the U.S., but focuses on border studies and other issues native to the southwest. Stony Brook is affiliate with leading research facilities and is working to improve global energy priorities, but couches these accomplishments in their impact on improving and serving Long Island and New York. Aspirational universities define *global* in a different scale than their elite counterparts. They are *of* the world, and view global engagement as something that takes place *out there.*

While each university in the sample is arguably a world-class institution, what this means is different at each university, and 'world-class' is represented by different types, and varying scales of activity. At the nation-level, universities in the United Kingdom speak in imperial terms, of dominating the global market. U.S. institutions speak in more democratic terms, perhaps as a remnant as a colonial subject, focused on how they can serve the world. Even these components of the narrative, dominance and service, are attenuated by tier, with Cambridge and Oxford more focused on their place in the global environment as natural leaders for the rest of the world. Leeds and Newcastle view their role as natural leaders in less cosmopolitan, less endemically dominant terms. In the U.S., Princeton and Harvard are the servants, but as a global force, while Nebraska and Texas strive to further their regional aspirations and serve mankind in narrower terms.

Summary of findings

Do presidents and vice-chancellors approach the public narrative of their institutional status in the same way? My findings suggest that they do not. Institutional leaders, even within the narrow band of research universities sampled, have unique constituencies and demands. While there are similarities, the differences are too many to ignore, such that institutional conceptions of status are not isomorphically defined. That is, my findings suggest status is not a field-defined term, and individual university conceptions of status rely on the unique nature of the individual institution. While institutional theory should have found greater commonality among world-class research-intensive universities, these findings imply that world-class research-universities may not be a narrow-enough field for analysis.

The analytical assumptions of both phases, the categorical analysis and the narrative analysis, are based on institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The study assumed that due to isomorphic forces, world-class research-intensive universities would pursue similar activities, and thus their presidents and vice-chancellors would recognize the same sorts of behavior as components of the university's status. These findings, though, provide a challenge to concept of the institutional field of world-class, research-intensive higher education. Institutional theory implies that among a homogenous subgroup, at least, similarity should be greater. Reisman's (1958) metaphor of snakelike progression explains some of the institutional behavior found in these data, but even that is insufficient. That analysis was based on broader categories within higher education, without the fine-tuned, international, longitudinal comparisons I rely on. By looking at this hyper-stratified slice of higher education, the lack of institutional homogeneity is magnified. Thus, I propose that isomorphism is insufficient to explain behavior among even a narrowly defined field like world-class, research-intensive universities, and that further analysis should account for differentiation of the field of world-class higher education.

The universities in the sample were each members of the most prestigious research organizations, and each is a respected institution on a global scale. Given that this small slice of the field of higher education has great similarity, it is fascinating that the way they ceremonialize speeches and presentations of institutional leaders has not been institutionalized. The variety of documents, including speeches and letters, publications and missives, reflects far greater diversity in the already-narrowed field of research-intensive world-class higher education. Further, the fact that only half of the universities developed strategic plans, and that is concentrated in the aspirational tier of universities, illustrates further distinction among what should have been a relatively homogenous set of universities. This level of differentiation might have been unsurprising had I been comparing elite research universities to liberal arts universities or community colleges, such that greater distinction in the field of higher education is necessary for future work.

Regardless of other variances in the field, presidents and vice-chancellors *have* institutionalized this assumption of administrative accomplishment. Institutional governance is a feature of the institution, rather than of outside political agency as Salmi (2009) proposed. This speaks to the role of the institutional leader as they assume power over the university, to their personal (and departmental) abilities to further the mission and drive the success of the institution. It cuts across aspirational and elite universities, from the United Kingdom to the United States, and across time: in each space the administrator is appropriating power and credit. By focusing on the accomplishments of the university as results of administrative oversight, presidents and vice-chancellors exhibit their ability to ‘guide the ship’ and ‘steer to the future’, ensuring their own validity in a world-class institution.

Implications for research

Another paradigm

Given that institutional theory is insufficient to explain behavior at world-class research universities, it is important to discuss how researchers may address this in future work. Primarily, a new paradigm is necessary when analyzing institutional behavior. In fact, the paradigm I suggest is based on an *old* paradigm, one that predates institutional theory. Reisman (1958) proposed that institutional behavior in academe be modeled on a snake. Institutions at the head of the field equate to the head of the snake. Universities lower in rank or status follow behind, just as the neck or body of the snake follows the head. The snake, read as the field of higher education, is diligently moving forward, diligently striving toward its destination. In academe, this implies that the leading institutions drive the direction and the rest of the field follows.

However, the metaphor of snakelike progression is not the metaphor of locomotive progression. Unlike a train, which has a leading driver (or several) and the rest of the field following behind in its track, snakes do not move forward in a straight line. The head of the snake may in fact have a distinct destination toward which it strives. But the body of the snake is slithering, tacking left and right, in numerous directions which do not mimic the path taken by the head. Indeed, individual segments of the snake mimic merely those segments directly in front, and lead only those segments immediately behind. Thus, looking at any individual piece of the snake will not give a clear indication of where the beast is going, nor even where it has been.

The metaphor of snakelike progression in higher education (Reisman, 1958) recognizes that behavior at leading institutions is not necessarily perceived by, nor mimicked by the rest of the institutions in the field. When addressing the potential isomorphic forces that explain similarities in universities, researchers must be sure to investigate differentiation as evidence of a disconnect in the causality intended by traditional institutional theory. If nothing, this research illustrates that world-class universities are not driven by a formal, strategic desire to *be* Harvard. Thus, any similarities between a university and one of the elites in the field may in fact be due to unrelated forces. Research needs to capture this in design and application, in order to better understand that our traditional expectations of the 'field' of higher education may be too narrow. In fact, the field 'higher education' is so differentiated that comparing even world-renowned research-intensive universities is too broad a category for analysis.

Distinct Fields

Beyond the metaphor of snakelike progression, I propose that behavior in the field of higher education cannot simply be explained by how a snake moves. Instead, there need to be multiple snakes. I retain that the 'field' of higher education might have enough similarity to justify internal comparisons. But there is enough differentiation that wholesale internal comparisons are invalid. These aspirational universities are doing things differently than their elite peers for more reasons than an inability to know where the 'head' is going: aspirational universities are part of a completely different snake than their elite peers. Without devolving into trying define the subsections of higher education as asps, adders, copperheads, sidewinders, and cobras, we need to reconsider how we problematize conceptualize the field of higher education. Broadly speaking, there are multiple organizational fields within higher education. There are multiple paths organizations are taking to achieve success. And there are multiple, distinct-field-dependent definitions of what it means to be successful.

Field breaks need to be defined in more narrow terms than in the past. There is sufficient similarity among public, U.S. AAU universities, that this may be a natural group. Similarly, Private, U.S. AAU universities may be another. But there is some value to considering the differences between a university like Texas, which lacks a medical campus, and UCLA. While both are public AAU schools, they are not necessarily in the same fiscal or political environment, much less the same conceptual environment. Comparative analysis of institutions may need to rely on those institutions defining their own field-membership. It is inappropriate to couple all research-intensive universities, or all national universities, or even all public doctorate-granting institutions in the United States with medical colleges, that have endowments larger than $1B and enrollments smaller than 30,000. Parsing the field of higher education, or any field of organizations, to this level implies that the comparisons upon which institutional theory relies need to be environmentally and relationally justified.

Comparative research

Comparative researchers have a tradition of basing analyses on differences between, and differences among, university systems. Indeed, this project looked at the similarities and differences between and among U.K. and U.S. institutions. However, without sufficient understanding of the unique national environment, of differentiation in the internal field of higher education, national and institutional positions in the global environment, and political/regional/economic/historic features unique to the investigated systems, an analysis would be incomplete. While Harvard and Oxford vie for the lead as the world's 'best' university on various metrics and reputational rankings, even these two institutions are fundamentally incomparable due to many reasons. Oxford's position in the global hierarchy is due to a different set of factors than what justifies Harvard's position. Thus, understanding the nuance and nature of either university, even in comparison to each other, is questionably valuable.

There is a movement in the developing world to create world-class universities. Indeed, the theoretical foundation of this project relies on an analysis of existing world-class universities which intended to detect the features necessary to this type of academic success. However, this implies that isomorphic mimicry is a valid path for developing universities to follow in their quest to build their institutions to international prominence. What this project illustrates, though, is that extant world-class universities do not follow the same path. Excellence is defined differently at each university, as is the importance of different types of research, of academic freedom, of the political environment, the relationship to the state and/or community, and many other features of these institutions. To declare that the path to world-class eminence is in following the lead of elite universities is to ignore the nuance that gave those elite universities their success. Instead, it is important for

That comparative work needs to look beyond mere comparisons is not a new concept. Instead, it is important to include the global, national, and local perspective for any study of international higher education. In an increasingly mobile world, further analysis is necessary at the regional level: beyond the nation, but not given to the scope of a global perspective. Further, it is important to constrain research so as not to promote isomorphic behavior, to promote institutional mimicry, merely for the goal of becoming like another institution in a different environment. Field-distinction argues that it is, indeed, not entirely possible to know the direction of another segment in the field, what environmental forces drove that segment to pursue that particular direction, or even whether or not two institutions are in the same distinct subfield.

Institutional culture

University progression is to always strive to be better, but these findings suggest that universities are constrained by different conceptions of what "better", or world-class means. These conceptions may be mistaken, misguided, or misleading. It is natural, perhaps even human nature, to measure ones activities against those perceived as better off, more successful, or more ideal. At the institutional level, this implies that in order to improve institutional status a university must compare with, and potentially learn from, their betters. Taking an idea from one university, whether a 'best practice' or a research-driven endeavor, is a common approach to what may be perceived as similar problems. However, even the problems themselves may only be similar on the surface. For instance, the recession was a uniform issue that universities have had to contend with since 2008. But for elite, U.S. universities the recession manifested as a dramatic decline in endowment funds. For aspirational U.S. universities the recession affected state budgets and their attending subsidies to higher education. In the U.K., the recession impacted the national system and coincided with changes in the formulae used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. While the 'problem' was uniform, the impact was institution-specific. Thus, institutional culture (which is intended to include institutional identity, uniqueness, and environment) determined the appropriate response to the problem of the recession.

Institutional culture is university-defined. Indeed, the culture of the university may be influenced by a much narrower band of peers and outside forces than the field of higher education would imply and at best is dependent on the narrow group of peers that the institution elects to be in their distinct field. There are patterns within the broad field of research-intensive world-class higher education, but even stronger similarities exist within distinct fields, subgroups that defy traditional institutional logics for the greater field. U.S. elite private universities are similar, but not necessarily compatible with the U.K. elites. Tier differences are striking, with flagship state public universities adopting not dissimilar cultural expectations, which span the Atlantic to include aspirational British universities. Leeds and Newcastle have much in common, and may be comparable. But one must exercise caution when equating two seemingly similar institutions. At the smallest level, even two research-intensive state universities, governed by a common governing board, do not have the same institutional culture. Expecting two research universities from different locations with different communities and environments to follow the same path is unjustifiable.

Universities are uniformly dedicated to knowledge and education. However, how each university defines their dedication to knowledge and education is unique, dependent on institutional tradition, environment, and other features that may not be visible or knowable to outsiders. The role of the university in a globalized higher education market may be a measurable proposal, but the role of a specific university in that market is going to be different. World-class universities have a culture of excellence, but their impact is different depending on status. Aspirational world-class universities see their global status as one of engagement, of participation in global issues. Elite universities approach their status as world-building institutions, indeed that the global higher education revolves around them. Each of these two mentalities reflects differentiation of institutional culture, and is merely a generalization of only one difference. The metaphor of snakelike progression illustrates that institutional culture at a university is more closely tied to the expectations of institutional culture at the university's immediate peers than it is to the leaders at the head of the snake. Investigations of institutional culture, indeed actions taken at institutions, need to take this into account.

Academic rankings

The role of rankings and league tables in higher education has been the subject of scrutiny since the first rankings were released. One salient criticism of formal metrics to evaluate higher education is that quantifying the activities, inputs, and outputs of these institutions does not sufficiently capture what it is that universities do. Universities are more than diploma-producing, research-generating, student-enrolling agencies. The expectation that every university on the planet can be measured by the same metric is an overlay of an isomorphic philosophy of uniformity on the entire field. This expectation proposes that whatever the leaders are doing, as measured by whatever individual ranking, is what the rest should be doing as well. Thus, rankings merely compare different types of universities to models that are perhaps appropriate to only a few.

For the universities being ranked, the goal becomes one of ascension, which is possible only through improvements in fields biased by the leaders on the league table.

These league tables identify metrics for improvement, and give scores to institutions as to their performance on those metrics. Thus, the obvious step is to look to the activities of those institutions higher up on the tables for guidance. Movement on the various scales is difficult, with little change in the top rankings since their inception. Further, they discount certain activities that may otherwise be perfectly justifiable at any given institution. Stony Brook does not want to be like Harvard—except perhaps in endowment and research income. But Stony Brook does not *need* to be like Harvard, such that comparing the two on the same scale is misguided. Stony Brook serves a different community that may not otherwise be served if the university further mimicked activities at elite universities.

Continued investigation of the role of rankings in university behavior is necessary. As they are currently constructed, the rankings generally approach higher education as one broad field, ignoring the distinct fields. Ranking systems may have value and legitimacy, but only if the user is able to relevantly understand the differences between 1^{st} and 5^{th} place, 1^{st} and 100^{th} place, and 1^{st} and ‘last’ place. Further, analysis of the ranking structures should be able to be parsed by distinct fields, allowing the consumer to easily learn whether Nebraska or Harvard is the best school for agricultural research or water and sustainability. The current goal of the rankings relies on the assumption that those at the top are the target, that they have achieved the ‘goal’ of higher education and ignores that there may be many goals, differing sets of which may define distinctions in the field of higher education.

Additionally, investigation into alternate forms of academic accountability are necessary, to move institutional goals beyond mere ascensions on the various rankings.

Such investigation must include analysis that recognizes that the ideal outcome for any given institution is not necessarily the same as for another. Universities exist in peer groups already, defining themselves by association with aspirational peers against whom they measure themselves. Research must be done to investigate peer-group selection and comparisons, and hopefully shed further light on the direction of progress in closely tied groups of universities while accounting for differentiation of institutional mission, culture, environment, and other factors.

Implications for practice

Strategic planning

As a practice, strategic planning has its roots in the business world. The expectation is that a strategic plan is something necessary to drive the industry forward, articulates the mission of the university, and how the institution intends to meet the perceived challenges and improve market-share and productivity. In the business world, it is, perhaps, easier to define success as an outcome of ‘moving forward’. Like many behaviors at universities, the strategic plan is viewed as something common to the field, and is thus necessary. While this business practice is common, it is not uniform. Business industries generally have a for-profit mentality, a fiscal bottom line, and must show profits to be successful. Universities have a different, perhaps more-complex definition of success. Success takes a village, and to be successful (or world-class) is different for each institution of higher education. Given institutional theory, one would think that institutional plans at aspirational universities would mimic those at the top. However, elite universities are less likely to articulate institution-wide planning commitments than others. In fact, the concept of strategic planning in higher education is *not* institutionalized across the field.

While I am not challenging the validity of the strategic plan as an institutional management device, I do recommend that those involved in the strategic planning become aware of the efficacy and utility of such activities. If the university leadership expects a strategic plan to catapult them into another rank or to improve their institutional reputation, they must be made aware that the iconic universities of the world did not follow that path. Indeed, universities at the top of the rankings became excellent institutions through a commitment to excellence *at every level* rather than through coordinated commitments driven by central administration. University administrators should take into account the intended outcome of the strategic planning process and realistically evaluate whether the delineation of a path is actually capable of producing results. Indeed, further research on the impact of strategic planning is necessary to justify its continued use in academe.

Institutional plans are motivational documents, political in nature, and strive to further the mission of the university. The goals of the plan are constrained by its applicability in individual units of the institutional constituency. Like the annual addresses of presidents and vice-chancellors, strategic plans rely on their audience for buy-in, for commitment. Thus, the constituency is the dominant target for the plan, although there are definitely other political audiences for whom the plan is intended. The process of strategic planning needs to consider the unique institutional culture and environment, such that looking out at other plans must be discounted. Due to the variance in strategic planning documents, and their inconsistency at iconic universities, the relevance of planning must be addressed and understood in order to earn sufficient community support.

Academic stratification

Universities exist in a differentiated field. While there are thousands of universities in the world, only a few have global reputation. Even considering the rankings and league tables, cataloguing the top 500 universities in the world is a daunting, if not impossible task. As the universities at the top of these various ranking systems are *consistently* at the top, there is a veneer of validity to these systems. However, university administrators and, hopefully, the public must recognize that comparing every university in the world on the same metric, or even the top 500 on the same scale, is an exercise in futility. University rankings and league tables are biased toward the top, with the activities recognize as excellent at those few elite universities measured as the ideals upon which all universities must be judged. There exist efforts to revise rankings, such as the upcoming U-Multirank program to allow for greater distinction, and to compare institutions on variations of the metrics currently used to generate composite scores. Institutions already limit their comparisons to their chosen peers: “We rank fifth in federal funding for universities without medical schools” (Texas, 2006). The ranking systems should embrace this and resist comparing across distinct fields. Just as my nephew’s team shouldn’t be compared with one at a university, an Olympic team, or one in the World Cup, we need greater rationality in where we draw the comparison lines in the various academic rankings.

Ranking systems lead to institutional behavior (Hazelkorn, 2007; 2008), with administrators responding to these judgment systems as a source of policy planning.

Further, improvement in the ranks results in an increase in admissions outcomes (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009). The benefits of rising in the ranks, or of being ranked highly, are not in question. However, the fact that ranking systems bias the observer to value certain activities, or realities, over others is an issue that may have dire consequences. Indeed, those institutions ranked at the top are *expected* to rank at the top, and thus the entire ranking system rewards the activities partaking by universities in that slice of the field of higher education. These ‘anchoring effects’ (Bowman & Bastedo, 2011) result in the elite universities remaining elite, while aspirational universities struggle and strive to meet those standards.

As universities increasingly compete in a broader environment, the temptation to mimic the behavior of those at the top of the rankings is growing. However, such activities may lead to increased stratification of higher education. The tendency of aspirational universities is to focus excellence, to identify and promote individual programs for their world-class nature and accomplishments. By doing so, they divert resources or attention away from other areas where their universities are not as competitive. The idea of strategic competitiveness is endemic to aspirational universities, and is completely missing from the elite universities. Thus, focusing on steeples of excellence within the ivory tower does not represent the elite approach, and indeed may further stratify the university position in a cementing hierarchy.

Administrative efforts to improve status in a higher education institution result in less access and greater stratification of public systems in the U.S. (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). These outcomes illustrate that an institutional mission may be usurped, or ignored, in the ongoing arms race of higher education aspirations. Universities with a unique culture, distinct institutional mission, or distinctive community need may sacrifice those values in an attempt to pursue the brass ring of a high rank. Thus, university administrators need to ensure that they pay more attention to their segment of the higher education field, rather than the broad field itself as represented by national or world ranking systems. Indeed, administrative policy should consider their distinct field within higher education to be tightly constrained to those universities with similar position, climate, environment, mission, and other factors.

Leadership, recognition, and accomplishment

Just as the strategic planning process is not mirrored by the most successful universities, so too is the individual success of institutions. Presidents and vice-chancellors have the positional power to recognize and promote certain activities. These activities may define or motivate the institution. Presidents and vice-chancellors must recognize the unique accomplishments, the unique environment of the institution. No two universities are alike, and each serves a different constituency. It is important that presidents and vice-chancellors recognize that proximity to the university, and the blinding variety of the field of higher education make it impossible to see what’s happening ahead in the field. Further, presidents and vice-chancellors need to recognize that whatever is happening ahead is not necessarily the direction their institution needs to go.

World-class universities were not developed by following a format, by striving for ascension through the academic ranks, nor by raw mimicry. Even in the information age, we lack vast amounts of relevant information for why a specific university undertook a specific activity. Trying to figure out what leading institutions are doing to solve a problem may be more than futile, it may be impossible. World-class universities evolved out of doing successful, basic research, by serving the specific needs of their community constituencies, and through diligent commitment to excellence. Presidents and vice-chancellors must identify and communicate the unique nature of their institutions, enabling the university constituency to carve its own path to excellence.

Additionally, presidents and vice-chancellors have a tendency to focus on their own, within the administrative ranks. The dominant focus on governance structures within each document was to promote the institutional management initiatives that support the mission of the university. While these initiatives are important, their dominance in the discourse is concerning for the rest of the constituency. It may be a function of awareness, wherein institutional endeavors are visible to the president or vice-chancellor through familiarity to the processes that supported and promoted those activities. But the *work* of the university should not be improving the university through managerial behaviors, but through the mission-driving creation and dissemination of knowledge. Thus, presidents and vice-chancellors need to be aware of the balance of the attention they pay on their own, as opposed to the rest of the academic constituency.

Conclusions and future research

My findings suggest that the traditional view of academic isomorphism, as supported by institutional theory is insufficient to explain behavior at even a tightly-defined subfield in higher education. Universities in the AAU or the Russell Group are not as similar as institutional theory would imply, even though they are all members of the field of higher education. Elite universities in the U.K. are different from elite universities in the U.S., just as aspirational universities in the U.S. and fundamentally different from their British counterparts. By focusing on this group of universities that is already tightly-constrained within the field of higher education, I have identified a great deal of variance in institutional discourse. The level of differentiation in institutional discourse at world-class research-intensive universities is great enough to support a new paradigm in institutional theory: the snakelike procession of institutional behavior. Universities may indeed mimic and duplicate each other, but institutional, cultural, environmental, and other differences make such isomorphic activities difficult to understand or identify. Indeed, the proximity of one institution to its peers is an occlusive force that makes it difficult to perceive what is taking place further away in the broad field of higher education. Thus, we should conceptualize institutional fields in smaller, more discrete groups that better account for similarities. Without such discrete attention to close-grouping, measured similarities may in fact be the result of accident or convergence, rather than causal mimicry. In order to better understand institutional behavior, we must first understand the institution, its relationship to the rest of the broad field, and its place in the immediate environment.

These findings imply a need for further research that constrains the comparative focus of institutional analysis to smaller, tighter groups of universities. One such area is the impact of changes in funding on aspirational U.S. public research universities as a force for isomorphic behavior. Aspirational universities are bound to their communities in ways that are not extant in the top elite institutions. They must serve the state or local community, strive for funding from a central agency that sees a competitive environment for funding—whether between universities, or for health care, public safety, and other demands on the public coffers. As aspirational universities have other sources of income beyond the public subsidy, they may be treated as secondary to the central funding mission. Research universities compete for grants that, while they fund the activities at the institution, justify *not* funding those activities from the local, public purse. Further research is necessary to investigate whether the field of aspirational, public, research-intensive higher education is experiencing increasing or decreasing isomorphic behavior.

Another justification of field-distinction is the conception that universities, especially in the United States, have self-defined peer groups. Institutional usually identify aspirational peers—institutions with which they aspire to compete on a level field—and those peer relationships may or may not be reciprocal. For instance, the University of Georgia identifies the University of Arizona as a peer institution, but the University of Arizona does not include Georgia in its peer group. Research into how these peer groups are formed may develop map of institutional peer-relations that better defines the segments of the field of higher education than the current ranking systems do. Such research would allow for the inclusion of environmental, social, and historical factors, which are perhaps more salient details in the relationship than aspirational similarities.

Further, international peer-relations among institutions of higher education is an area that may benefit from greater understanding of field-distinction. Research should engage the study of regional relationships on the periphery of western higher education. Again, there may be different metrics for evaluation of quality, of comparison, but an understanding of these sub-fields in higher education is necessary. How do universities develop associations, and what activities does that association promote? Is there an increase in isomorphic activity, does the process ‘westernize’ institutions on the periphery, and are the relationships themselves causally linked to intended outcomes?

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Appendix: Figures

Figure 1: Institutional Sample

University	Location	Group	Association	ARWU[a]	QS[b]	THES[c]
Cambridge	UK	Elite	Russell Group	5	1	6
Harvard	USA	Elite	AAU	1	2	1
Oxford	UK	Elite	Russell Group	10	6	6
MIT	USA	Elite	AAU	4	5	3
Princeton	USA	Elite	AAU	7	10	5
Leeds	UK	Aspirant	Russell Group	101–150	85	168
Nebraska	USA	Aspirant	AAU[d]	151–200	451–500	n/a 201+
Newcastle	UK	Aspirant	Russell Group	201–300	140	152
Stony Brook	USA	Aspirant	AAU	151–200	194	78
UT Austin	USA	Aspirant	AAU	38	67	n/a 201+

[a] ARWU: Academic Ranking of World Universities, Shanghai Jiao-Tong University, 2010. http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2010.html

[b] QS: QSWorld University Rankings, Quacquarelli Symonds, 2010. http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2010

[c] THES: Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Times Higher Education Supplement, 2010–2011. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2010-11/world-ranking

[d] The University of Nebraska left the AAU in 2011.

Figure 2: Document Sample

University	SLA 2006	SLA 2007	SLA 2008	SLA 2009	SLA 2010	Strategic Plan
Cambridge	1	1	1	1	1	n/a
Harvard	1	2	1	1	1	*
Oxford	1	1	1	1	1	2008
MIT	1	2	2	3	1	n/a
Princeton	1	1	1	1	1	n/a
Leeds	1	1	1	1	1	2009
Nebraska	1	1	1	1	1	2008
Newcastle	n/a	n/a	1	1	1	2010
Stony Brook	1	1	1	1	1	2010
UT Austin	1	1	1	1	1	n/a

Note: n/a = not available

* Not included in data set

Figure 3: Quantity of Status References

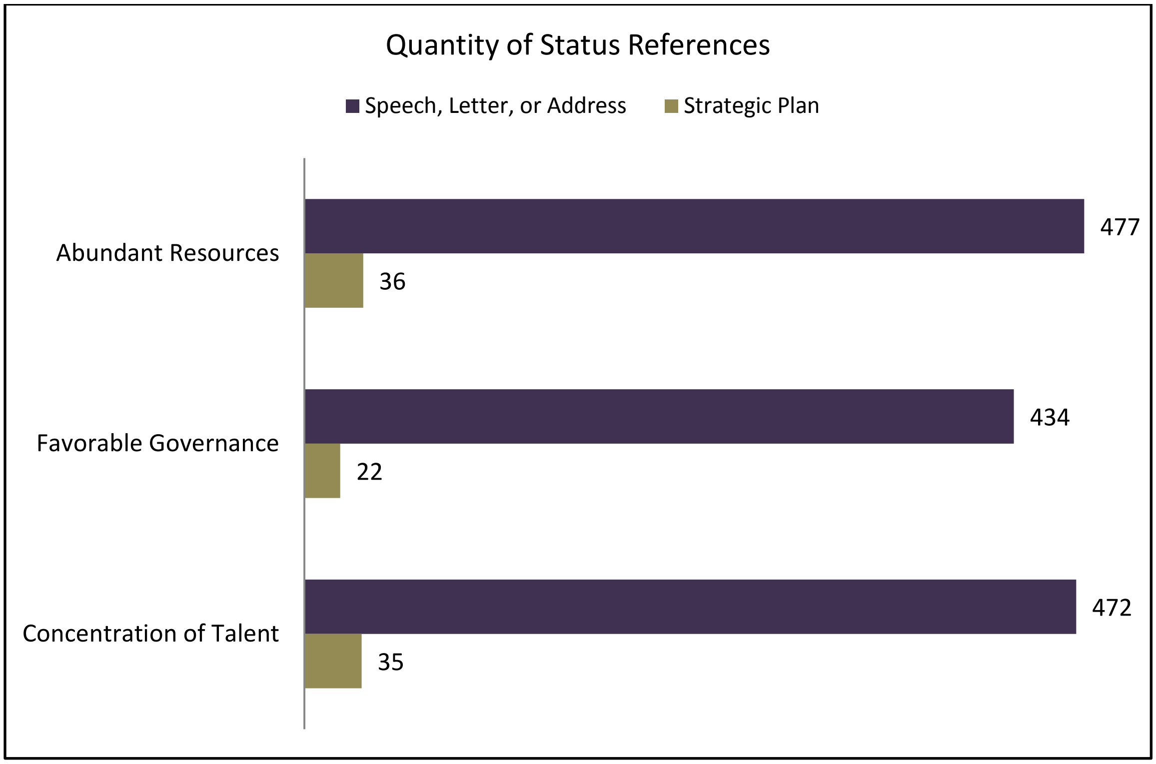

Figure 4: Document Word Counts

School	Total Words	Total Documents	Average Length	Total Speeches	Total Speech Words	Average Speech Length	Strategic Plan Length
Cambridge	14634	5	2927	5	14634	2927	n/a
Harvard	20251	6	3375	6	20251	3375	n/a
Leeds	16446	6	2741	5	9841	1968	6605
MIT	12975	9	1442	9	12975	1442	n/a
Nebraska	29183	6	4864	5	24568	4914	4615
Newcastle	21498	4	5375	3	18145	6048	3353
Oxford	49353	6	8226	5	32492	6498	16861
Princeton	13529	5	2706	5	13529	2706	n/a
Stony Brook	23586	5	4717	5	23586	4717	n/a
Texas	19521	5	3904	5	19521	3904	n/a
Totals	220976	57	3877	53	189542	3576	

* n/a—Strategic Plan not available or produced

Figure 5: Percentage of Total Status References by Source

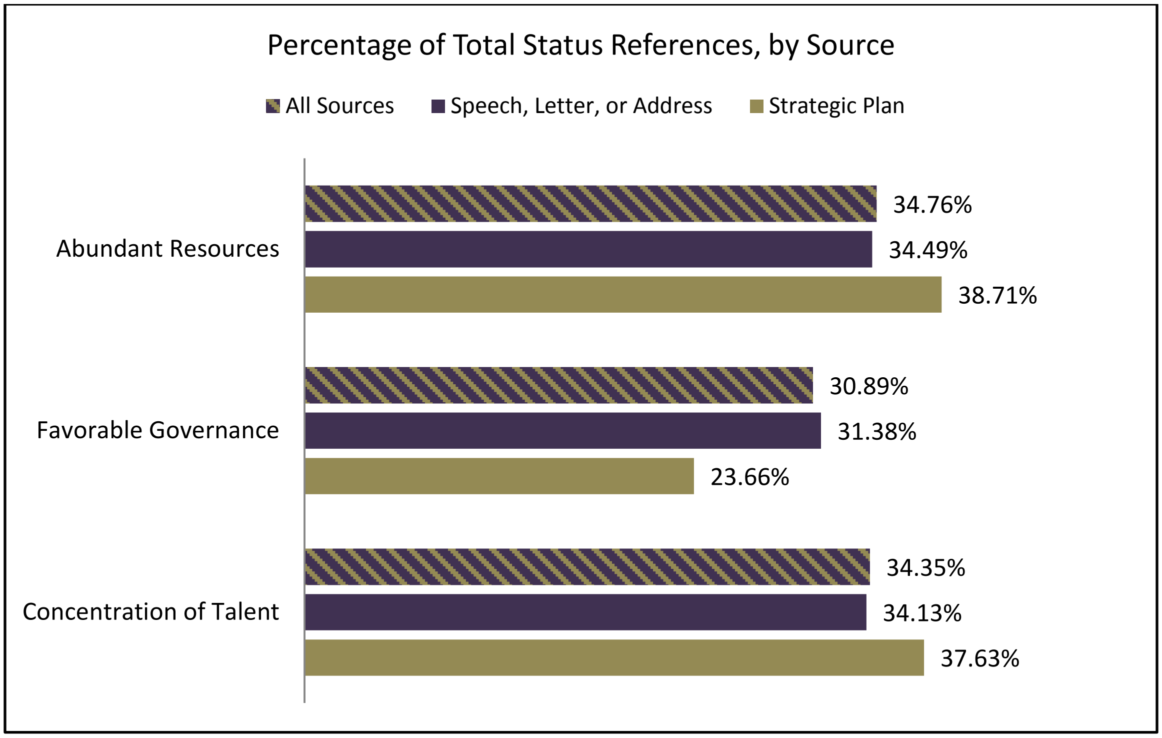

Figure 6: Quantity of Abundant Resources Subcategory References

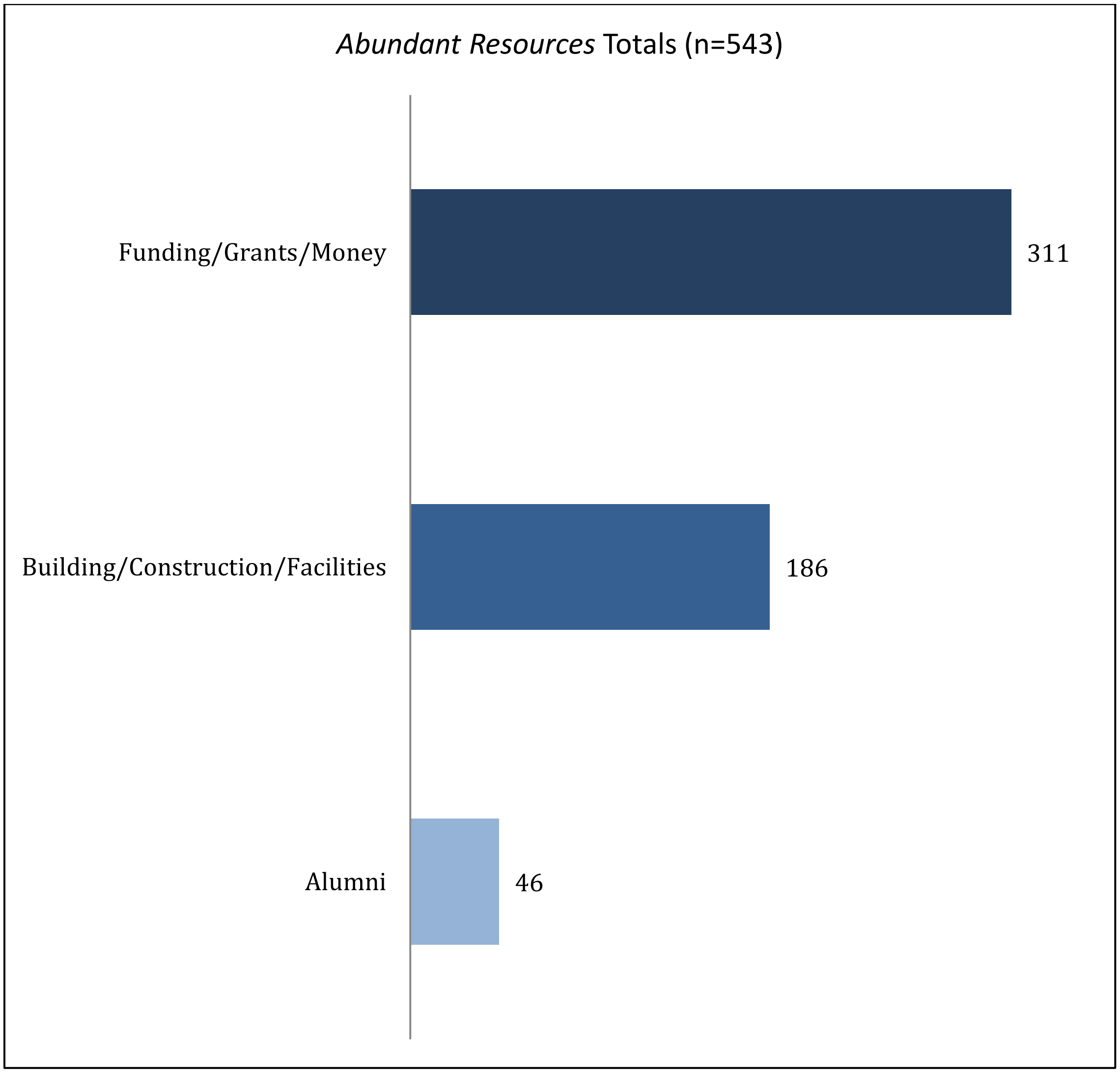

Figure 7: Percentage of Total Abundant Resources References

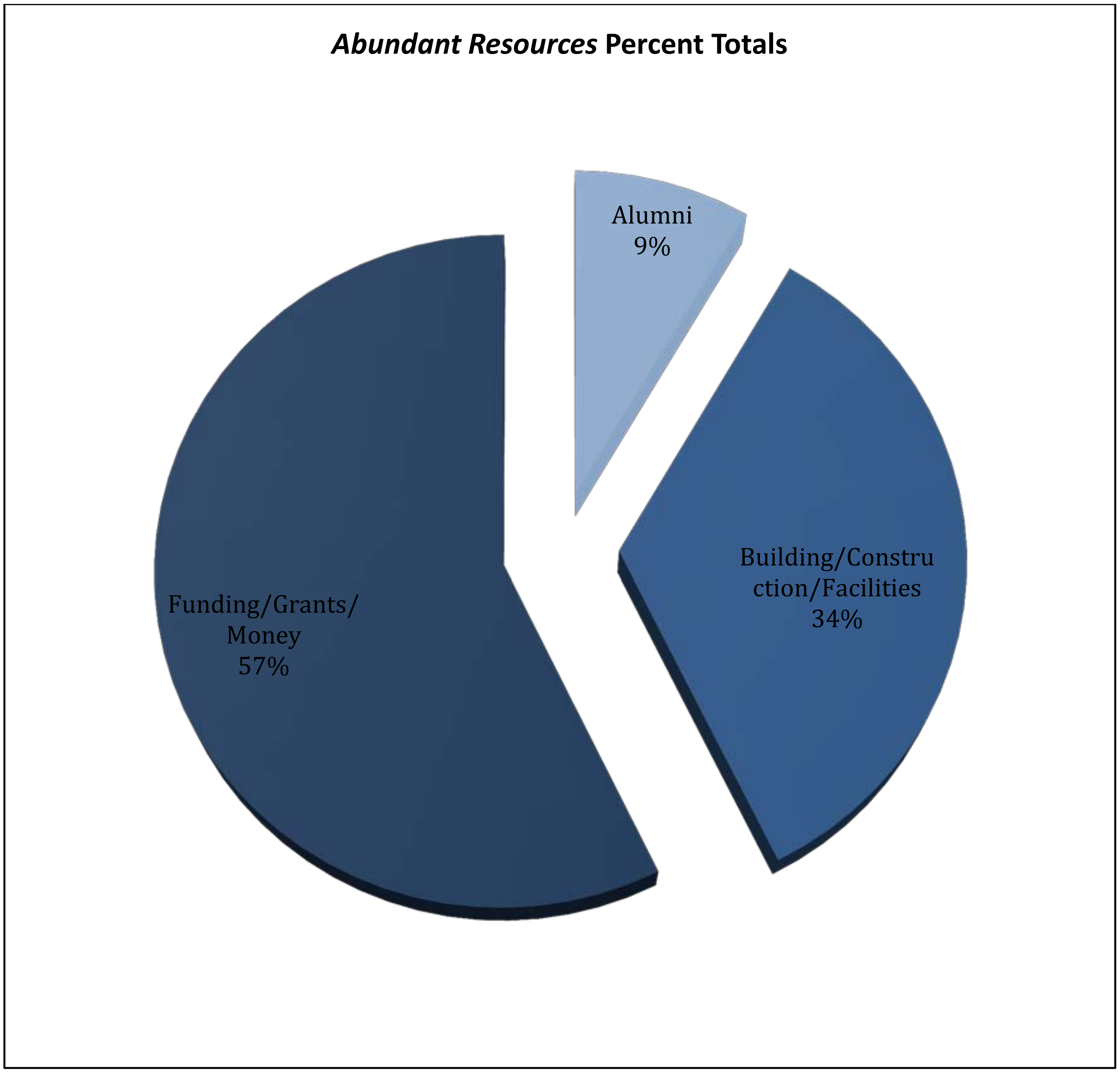

Figure 8: Quantity of Favorable Governance Subcategory References

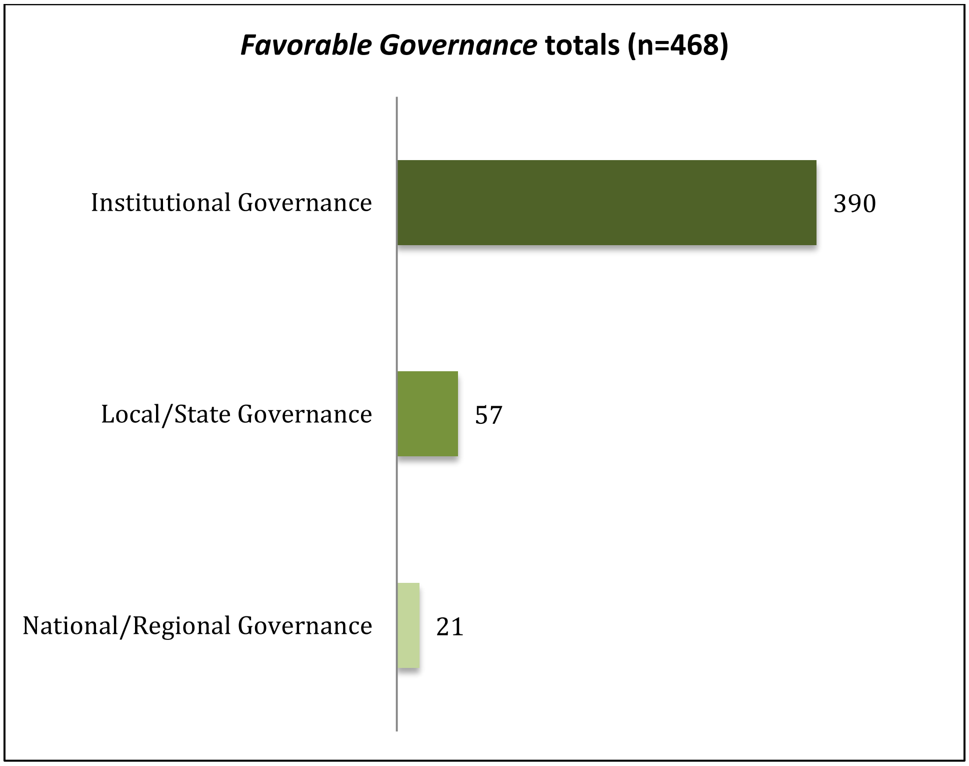

Figure 9: Percentage of Total Favorable Governance References

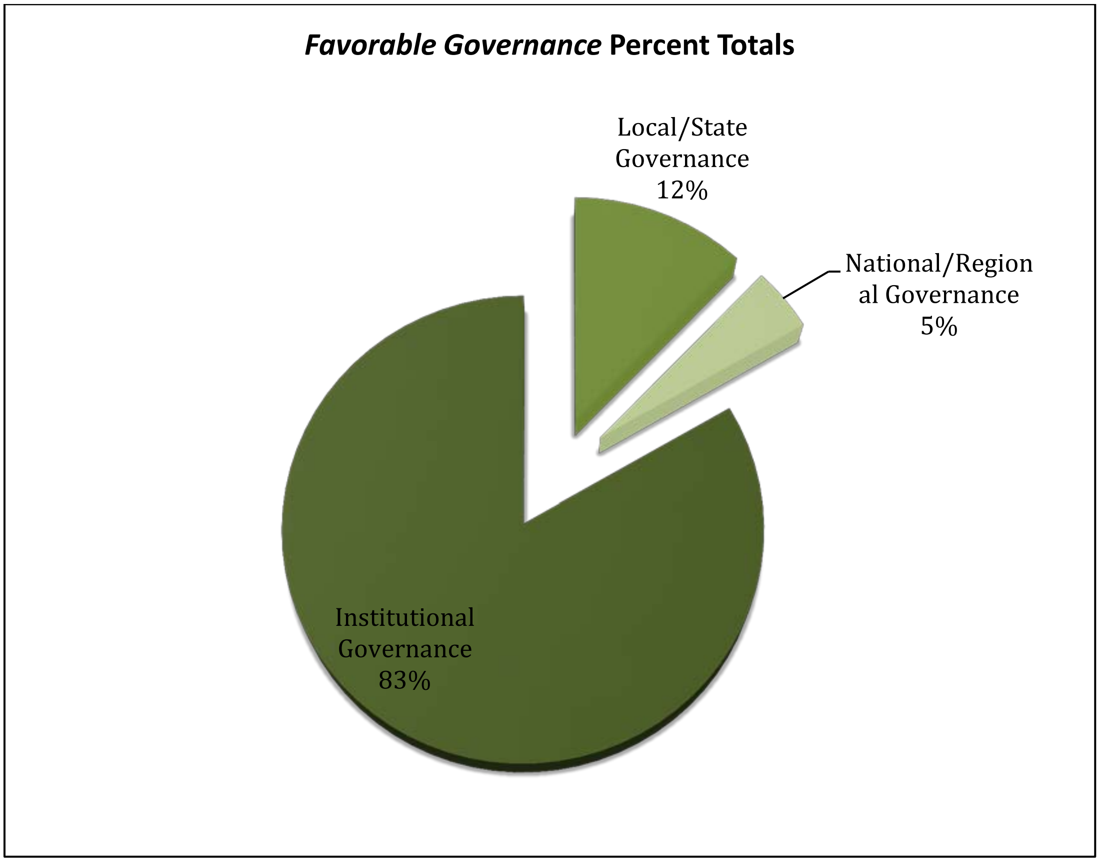

Figure 10: Quantity of Concentration of Talent Subcategory References

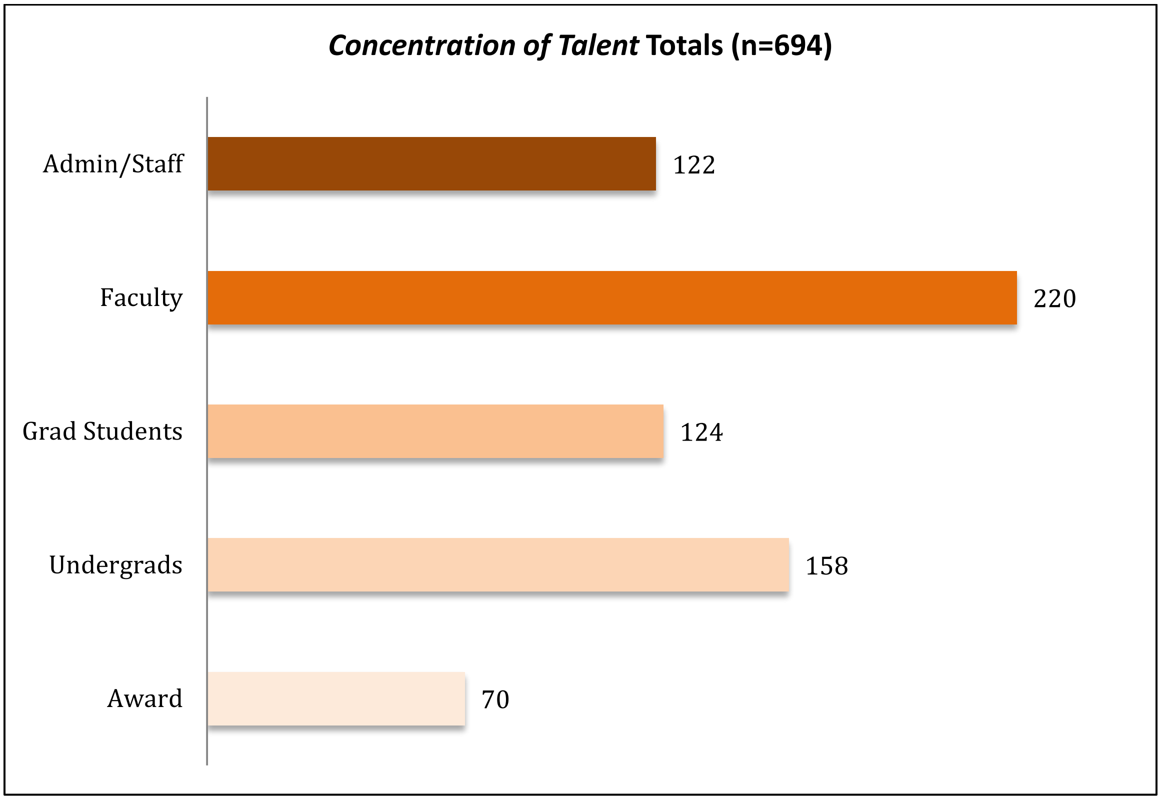

Figure 11: Percentage of Total Concentration fo Talent References

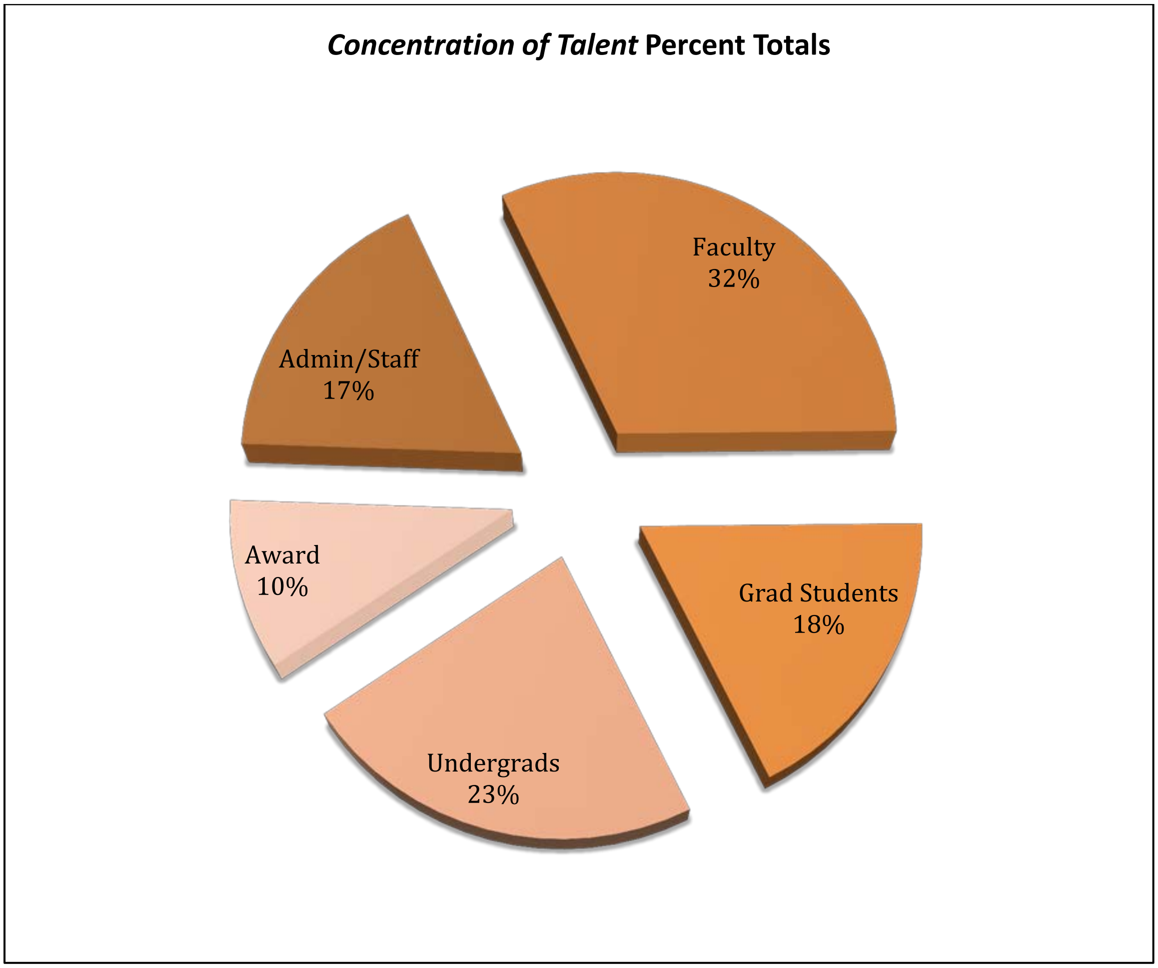

Figure 12: Excerpt Totals

Totals by Subcategory	SLA's	SP's	Total	Within-Subcategory*	Total %
Funding/Grants/Money	290	21	311	57.27%	**18.24%**
Building/Construction/Facilities	169	17	186	34.25%	**10.91%**
Alumni	44	2	46	8.47%	**2.70%**
Institutional Governance	372	18	390	83.33%	**22.87%**
Local/State Governance	53	4	57	12.18%	**3.34%**
National/Regional Governance	20	1	21	4.49%	**1.23%**
Admin/Staff	116	6	122	17.58%	**7.16%**
Faculty	208	12	220	31.70%	**12.90%**
Grad Students	107	17	124	17.87%	**7.27%**
Undergrads	141	17	158	22.77%	**9.27%**
Award	70	0	70	10.09%	**4.11%**

*Within-Subcategory values are reflected in figures 7 (Abundant Resources), 9 (Favorable Governance), 11 (Concentration of Talent)

Figure 13: Excerpt Percentages by Subcategory