

# What's in a Name? Managing Multiple Organizational Identities in a Catholic University

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## Abstract

This paper examines the situation surrounding a proposed nickname change for Marquette University. The analysis draws upon current work that explores multiple organizational identities and stakeholder participation in making such a decision. The article focuses on Catholic universities and considers tensions that emerge as the faith mission interacts with the secular purposes of the organization. We argue that, rather than focusing on the faith-mission alone, Catholic universities are at their best when they attend to multiple identity targets when communicating decisions to various constituency groups.

In May 2004, the Marquette University administration received an offer of two million dollars to change the university's athletic nickname<sup>1</sup> and mascot from the Golden Eagles to its former name of the Warriors. Ultimately, the board of trustees members decided to retain the Golden Eagles name, but only after an extensive public discussion of the issue that lasted more than a year. Recently, many universities have found themselves in a similar situation when considering athletic nicknames as a partial representation of the larger institutional identity. A university's

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<sup>1</sup> The term "nickname" is used here for particular reasons. As a part of the decision-making process at Marquette University, administrators at the institution were careful to delineate between logo, mascot, and nickname. The logo is the symbol used to represent the athletic teams; the mascot is the animal, person, or object also used to represent the athletic teams; and the nickname is the moniker used to describe the mascot. In this study, a nickname and mascot were examined as aspects of how an organization's identity is communicated. However, they do not represent all aspects of the identity.

name, mascot, and/or imagery are far more than merely labels; indeed, they are key signifiers of the university's identity.

Questions of organizational identity are increasingly salient in today's turbulent organizational environment. In truth, the discussion is not simply a question of an organization's *identity*—but rather of an organization's *identities*. When an organization's purposes become more diverse and complex, the framing of a singular identity becomes increasingly difficult; the institution faces the challenge of how best to serve multiple functions for several audiences. Adding to the complexity, key stakeholders request an active voice in organizational decisions and processes. This can result in the difficult situation in which the institution seeks to adapt to a changing environment, while simultaneously responding to the interests of multiple stakeholders.

Catholic universities, such as Marquette, are not exempt from the sometimes daunting task of establishing a clear, yet malleable, identity. All universities are increasingly subjected to market-based pressures of identity articulation, but faith-based institutions seek to remain competitive while also maintaining their religious character. In essence, for universities like Marquette, the challenge is how to manage multiple-identity demands. These include the desires to be academically excellent, to be competitive in the market, and to stay true to a faith commitment. As such, it is increasingly important for Catholic universities to consider the ways in which their identities are articulated across a variety of contexts and in relation to myriad pressures and issues that they face in today's competitive academic environment. This article examines the existence of multiple identity expectations in Catholic universities with a particular focus on the dynamic among organizational identity, university mission, decision-making, and multiple stakeholder perspectives.

## **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### *Identity and Catholic Universities*

Catholic universities find themselves at a crossroads. The origins of Catholic education are tied to the long faith tradition of the Catholic Church. As such, the faith of the Church is seen to be a significant aspect of the identity of Catholic higher education. In an effort to meet the needs of the Catholic faithful, the Church ventured into the arena of education, establishing universities first in Europe and then throughout

the United States.<sup>2</sup> Today, many such institutions struggle to balance their concerns about competing with their secular counterparts with their desire to maintain a decidedly Catholic character. Some scholars and practitioners even suggest that Catholic universities are experiencing an identity crisis.<sup>3</sup> In response, a number of Catholic institutions have placed a renewed emphasis on the development of mission statements and seek to clearly convey this mission to organizational members.<sup>4</sup> While not equivalent to the identity of the university, the university mission is tied to overall efforts to communicate a particular identity. Considered in a secular sense, an organization's mission represents the ideology, culture, and values that drive the organization.<sup>5</sup> For faith-based organizations, mission has the additional meaning of propagating a faith tradition.<sup>6</sup> The mission of the faith-based university, therefore, represents the purpose and the spiritual calling of the institution.

A central challenge for Catholic universities is how to communicate their identity in a way that captures both their secular and spiritual purposes, while allowing them to remain competitive. Catholic institutions of higher education, like all colleges and universities, find themselves seeking new ways to articulate their identity. Some consider adopting select management practices of business corporations.<sup>7</sup> In this article we argue that bringing the conversations of organizational communication and management together can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how a mission-based identity might best be articulated by Catholic universities.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Alice Gallin, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); John Wilcox, "Religious Identity: A Critical Issue in Catholic Higher Education," in *Enhancing Religious Identity: Best Practices from Catholic Campuses*, ed. John R. Wilcox and Irene King (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000), xv-xxv.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Feldner, "Living Our Mission: A Study of University Mission Building," *Communication Studies* 57 (2006): 67-85.

<sup>5</sup> John M. Swales and Pricilla S. Rogers, "Discourse and the Projection of Corporate Culture: The Mission Statement," *Discourse and Society* 6(2) (1995): 223-242.

<sup>6</sup> Feldner, "Living Our Mission," 67-85.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis A. Gioia, "From Individual to Organizational Identity," in *Identity in Organizations: Building Theory Through Conversations*, ed. David Allred Whetten and Paul C. Godfrey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998), 17-31.

*Managing Multiple Organizational Identities*

Organizations compete based on their ability to establish clear identities and to express these identities to others.<sup>8</sup> In the simplest of terms, an organization's identity explains what it does and describes that which is central, distinct, and enduring.<sup>9</sup> An organization's identity is communicated in several ways, including the articulation of mission statements, organizational goals, and values. Identity is also communicated through the practices, actions, and statements of an organization's members.<sup>10</sup> Organizational identity management processes, then, are boundary-setting exercises by which leaders represent their organization to others.<sup>11</sup>

This perspective on organizational identity is largely rhetorical as identity is comprised of all the discourses that project a particular image of the organization.<sup>12</sup> According to Kuhn and Nelson, organizational identity is both medium and outcome of discursive acts.<sup>13</sup> Organizations focus attention on communicating their identities in the hope that individual actors (internal and external) will make decisions that support the interests of the organization.<sup>14</sup> In short, organizational identity is important because it shapes how individuals respond to organizations.

Despite the fact that organizational identity is defined in part by its enduring nature, the complex and changing organizational environment also creates a reality in which organizational identities are fluid.<sup>15</sup> Individual and collective understandings of identity can and do

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<sup>8</sup> Majken Schultz, et al., ed., *The Expressive Organization: Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Albert and David Whetten, "Organizational Identity," in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, ed. Larry L. Cummings and Barry M. Staw (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985), 263-295.

<sup>10</sup> Susanne G. Scott and Vicki R. Lane, "A Stakeholder Approach to Organizational Identity," *Academy of Management Review* 25 (2000): 43-62.

<sup>11</sup> Lars T. Christensen and George Cheney, "Articulating Identity in an Organizational Age," in *Communication Yearbook* 17, ed. Stanley A. Deetz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994), 222-235.

<sup>12</sup> Scott and Lane, "A Stakeholder Approach," 43-62.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Kuhn and Natalie Nelson, "Reengineering Identity: A Case Study of Multiplicity and Duality in Organizational Identification," *Management Communication Quarterly* 16 (2002): 5-38.

<sup>14</sup> James R. Sanza and Connie Bullis, "Everybody Identifies with Smokey the Bear: Employee Responses to Newsletter Identification," *Management Communication Quarterly* 12 (1999): 347-399.

<sup>15</sup> Gioia, "From Individual to Organizational Identity," 17-31.

change over time.<sup>16</sup> For example, International Business Machines (IBM) has an identity that is both enduring, yet fluid. From its original focus on business measurement tools (such as scales and tabulating devices) at the turn of the twentieth century to today's focus on e-business infrastructure support, IBM has changed with the technological times while maintaining a core focus on the recording, processing, communicating, storing, and retrieval of information.<sup>17</sup> Organizational leaders face the challenge of balancing the fluidity of organizational identity with the need for some consistency in defining its values and purposes.

One of the difficulties in considering organizational identity is the reality that many organizations do not represent a single identity. The many individuals who work with and within organizations hold varied conceptions of the organization's identity. Often these identities can include two or more perspectives that are deemed incommensurate.<sup>18</sup> For example, some may think of an organization as a family, while others see it as only a business. Pratt and Foreman note that organizational members may not be conscious of all identities, and further point out that these identities need not be universally held by all members.<sup>19</sup>

When communicating an organizational identity, organizations must always consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.<sup>20</sup> Pratt and Foreman highlight the degree to which organizational identity involves a reciprocal relationship between individuals and the organization.<sup>21</sup> Just as the organization's identities affect individual behavior, individual behavior also shapes the organization's identities. Putnam asserts that organizations are ultimately the result of negotiations among stakeholders.<sup>21a</sup> As organizations interact with multiple stakeholder groups, they are faced with the need to negotiate with these

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<sup>16</sup> Jane E. Dutton, et al., "Organizational Images and Member Identification," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39 (1994): 239-263.

<sup>17</sup> International Business Machines, "History of IBM," [http://www-03.ibm.com/ibm/history/history/history\\_intro.html](http://www-03.ibm.com/ibm/history/history/history_intro.html).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Foreman, et al., "Members' Identification with Multiple-identity Organizations," *Organization Science* 13 (2002): 618-635.

<sup>19</sup> Michael G. Pratt and Peter Foreman, "Classifying Managerial Responses to Multiple Organizational Identities," *Academy of Management Review* 25 (2000): 18-42.

<sup>20</sup> George Cheney, *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Pratt and Foreman, "Classifying Managerial Responses."

<sup>21a</sup> Linda Putnam, "Negotiation and Organizing: Two Levels within the Weickian Model," *Communication Studies* 40 (1989): 249-257.

groups to survive.<sup>22</sup> Cheney highlights the degree to which a collective organizational identity is rooted in shared interests.<sup>23</sup> As such, organizations engage in interactions with stakeholders to identify and establish such shared interests.

### *Research Questions*

Communication is a crucial variable in understanding how organizations establish an identity that conveys fundamental organizational values and mission.<sup>24</sup> It is not simply a question of what the leadership chooses to convey about an organization's identity; rather, organizational stakeholders also participate in the process of shaping that identity. Furthermore, organizational members often develop personal connections with an organization's identity and are invested in how an organization is perceived.<sup>25</sup>

While administrators at Catholic universities may focus a great deal of attention on how to communicate an organizational identity that primarily reflects the religious mission, how well this faith-based identity resonates with all stakeholder groups remains to be seen. During a university's history, issues arise that can cause organizational members to consider underlying organizational identities more fully. It follows, then, that the ensuing controversies over and discussion of these issues can reveal organizational identities more clearly. This study builds on previous research by considering the ways in which Catholic universities manage their faith-mission in the context of multiple identities, and engage with stakeholders throughout decision-making processes.

The issue of organizational identity and stakeholder response is particularly salient to Catholic universities for several reasons. It is the particular challenge of Catholic universities to manage an identity that expresses their faith tradition along with one that emphasizes their academic excellence. Further, universities maintain ties with several stakeholder groups in addition to the traditional organizational members

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<sup>22</sup> Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, "Organizational Environments and Organizational Information Processing," in *The New Organizational Communication Handbook: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Frederic M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), 197-230.

<sup>23</sup> Cheney, *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society*.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Jerold Aust, "Communicated Values as Indicators of Organizational Identity: A Method for Organizational Assessment and Its Application in a Case Study," *Communication Studies* 55 (2004): 515-534.

<sup>25</sup> Dutton, et al., "Organizational Images," 239-263.



(i.e., employees). Previous studies have identified some common university stakeholders as alumni,<sup>26</sup> students,<sup>27</sup> employees,<sup>28</sup> and boards of directors.<sup>29</sup> Universities are dependent on the support of all of these groups for their continued success. Since Catholic universities must manage multiple identities with an audience of varied stakeholders, this makes them ideal settings for considering the interrelationship of organizational identity, mission, and stakeholder participation. Specifically, this research aims to develop an understanding of how organizational efforts to communicate decision-making processes reveal the existence of multiple identities, and how stakeholders' perceptions of the organization's identity can influence their responses to organizational actions. This research was guided by the following questions:

1. What organizational identities were revealed in the negotiations and discourse surrounding Marquette University's nickname selection?
2. How did Marquette University's decision-making processes reflect a particular organizational identity management process?

## Method

### *Case Background: Marquette University Nickname Decision*

This study examines a case in which stakeholder responses to debate surrounding the issue of the Marquette University nickname revealed a great deal about the organization's multiple identities. The discussion about Marquette's athletic nickname occurred during a thirteen month period; in June 2005, the university announced that it would retain the Golden Eagles nickname.

Marquette University is a Jesuit Catholic University. In addition to its reputation as a quality Catholic academic institution, Marquette

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<sup>26</sup> Fred A. Mael and Blake E. Ashford, "Alumni and their Alma Mater: A Partial Test of the Reformulated Model of Organizational Identification," *Journal of Occupational Behavior* 13 (1992): 103-123.

<sup>27</sup> Kim D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer, "Member's Responses to Organizational Identity Threats: Encountering and Countering the Business Week Rankings," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41 (1996): 442-476.

<sup>28</sup> Kim D. Elsbach and Mary A. Glynn, "Believing Your Own 'PR': Embedding Identification in Strategic Reputation," in *Advances in Strategic Management*, ed. Joel A. C. Baun and Jane E. Dutton (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1996), 63-88.

<sup>29</sup> Karen Golden-Biddle and Hayagreeva Rao, "Breaches in the Boardroom: Organizational Identity and Conflicts of Commitment in a Nonprofit Organization," *Organizational Science* 8 (1997): 593-611.

is nationally known for its successful men's basketball program, which won the NCAA national championship in 1977. That team was known as the Marquette Warriors. When the basketball program again drew national attention in 2002 by making an NCAA Final Four, the team was called the Marquette Golden Eagles.

Marquette's teams have had other monikers over their history (Blue & Gold, Hilltoppers, and the Golden Avalanche); however, for many of the university's fans and alumni, the most familiar names are associated with successful men's basketball teams. In 1954, the Marquette Student Senate adopted the Warriors nickname for its athletic teams. The name was connected with Milwaukee's Major League Baseball team at the time, the Braves. In addition, the nickname was said to reflect a historical relationship between the university and Wisconsin's Native American tribes. From 1961-1971, the Marquette Warrior was represented by a cartoon-like characterization of a Native American warrior called Willie Wampum. Amid protests, Willie Wampum was retired and replaced by First Warrior in 1980, which was then abandoned in 1987. In 1993, Marquette University dropped Warriors as a nickname because many Native Americans felt the word Warrior was derogatory and culturally insensitive.<sup>29a</sup> In 1994, the Golden Eagle was selected as the new athletic nickname and mascot.

Over the next ten years, some alumni and community members lobbied for a return to the Warriors nickname. This campaign came to a climax when, at the conclusion of his commencement remarks, alumnus and board of trustees member Wayne Sanders offered the university two million dollars if it returned to the Warriors nickname. Marquette University's president, Reverend Robert A. Wild, refused the gift but did place the issue before the board of trustees for further consideration. The board began its consideration of the issue by passing a resolution that indicated that the university would not use any Native American imagery or symbolism as a part of its athletic nickname. After a year of deliberation (including an online survey of Marquette students, faculty, staff, and alumni; focus groups with key stakeholders; and several public listening sessions), the board of trustees announced that Marquette University would drop the Golden Eagles

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<sup>29a</sup> Brigid O'Brien, "Marquette to Continue Nickname Discussion: Board Passes Resolution Prohibiting Use of Native American Imagery or Symbolism in Athletic Logo, Mascot, Nickname," Office of Marketing and Communication: Press Release, September 22, 2004, <http://www.marquette.edu/omc/newscenter/news/NicknameSept22.shtml>.



nickname and replace it with the Marquette Gold. The decision was extremely unpopular, and the board withdrew this decision, choosing to allow key stakeholder groups to vote on a nickname. In a two-phase voting process, in which Warriors was not an option, the final choice was to remain as the Golden Eagles.

### *Procedures*

Data for this study were collected through a review of the newspaper coverage of the period in question, a compilation of survey results collected at the time (and made available by Marquette University), and the press releases and official communications issued by Marquette University during the thirteen month period from May 2004 to June 2005.

A total of 164 documents were gathered. Of these, two were the surveys conducted by Marquette University and the results were posted on the Marquette University website. Of the remaining 162 documents, the following items were gathered: 74 news stories; 21 regular news columns (i.e., regularly appearing features by newspaper columnists); 13 editorials; 12 letters to the editor; 39 Marquette University press releases; one University of Wisconsin press release; and two letters from Marquette University president, Reverend Robert A. Wild.

Fifty-four of the news articles appeared in local Milwaukee media outlets; 31 appeared in national media outlets; 15 appeared in the university student newspaper; 10 appeared in regional newspapers; 10 were published online; and 42 were documents made available through the Marquette University's Public Affairs office.

This study uses an interpretive lens to view identity. According to this paradigm of inquiry, the focus is on understanding the meaning system used by relevant stakeholders.<sup>30</sup> Data were analyzed using content analysis<sup>31</sup> to identify key themes. Both authors read through all articles and independently identified common themes that emerged from the data as they related to the research questions. Then, both authors and a research assistant coded the data, identifying each time a particular theme was mentioned and which stakeholder group's voice was represented.

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<sup>30</sup> Gioia, "From Individual to Organizational Identity."

<sup>31</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001).

## Results & Interpretations

### *Emergence of Organizational Identities*

Let us begin with our first research question: *What organizational identities were revealed in the negotiations and discourse surrounding Marquette University's nickname selection?* The negotiations surrounding the nickname choice reveal the existence of three distinct identities that various stakeholder groups associate with Marquette University. First, the alumni and a segment of the students who spoke on this issue most directly identified with Marquette as an athletic tradition (program). The emphasis was on the proud tradition and nostalgia that they associated with Marquette basketball championships. Next, a segment of the students and the faculty referenced the academic identity of the university. When faculty spoke of the diversity issue, they referenced Marquette's responsibility to educate students and the community. Finally, the administration emphasized Marquette's identity as Jesuit and Catholic. Throughout the statements offered by the administration, the core principle used to define and to justify decisions was grounded in Marquette's mission, which is rooted in human dignity and Catholic values. The presentation is not intended to suggest the relative importance of each identity to the organization, but instead to show that different stakeholder groups invoked each of these identities in different ways.

### *Marquette as Athletic Tradition*

As the university mascot is most closely associated with the athletic programs, it is not surprising that one of the identities that emerged from the various stakeholder groups' discussions was that of Marquette as an organization with a storied athletic tradition. For many alumni who spoke on this issue, and for several of the students, the name Warrior best represented the strength and pride that they associated with Marquette. The president of the alumni association explained that alums would "feel better and more proud of their alma mater if its athletes were Warriors."<sup>32</sup> Echoing this sentiment, another alumnus offered the following opinion in an editorial column written after the announcement of Gold as the new moniker for the team: "Gold is, in

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<sup>32</sup> Lindsey McKee, "Board of trustees to reconsider warrior," *Marquette Tribune*, Oct 5, 2005, <http://marquettetribune.org/2004/09/23/news/board-of-trustees-to-reconsider-warrior/>.

fact, a fine color. But it's a color. It does not bring to mind strength, competitiveness, and winning as the Warriors nickname did."<sup>33</sup> Both comments underscore the tendency of alumni and community supporters to orient toward Marquette's athletic tradition above other identifying features when thinking about this issue. As one alumnus quipped, "The intention isn't to offend [anybody]. The intention is to have a name that sounds good for the university and the athletic team."<sup>34</sup>

In discussing the relative merits of one name over another, students and alumni often referenced their memories of the university's athletic program and a desire to capture the nostalgia through the name choice. A senior at the time of the nickname discussion offered the following rationale for returning to Warriors: "There's a lot of tradition with the Warriors. That's who won a national championship in 1977. I don't think Golden Eagles is a strong, competitive name."<sup>35</sup> Still another student suggested, "When people think of Marquette Warriors, they think of Al McGuire's teams. They think of George Thompson, the great players of that era."<sup>36</sup> Finally, a student who challenged arguments against changing back to Warriors asserted that in changing the name to the Golden Eagles, Marquette had "lost this part of the identity beyond our Catholic, Jesuit heritage."<sup>37</sup> In essence, these students and alumni recognized a distinct identity for Marquette that coexisted with the Jesuit tradition, but as the last student explained, for many of these stakeholders these identities were separate.

The separation of these identities was not tied exclusively to alumni and students, but also included administration. Most often, comments from administrators were made in reference to the selection of Gold as a replacement for the Golden Eagles. Upon announcing the decision to become the Gold, the official university press release included the following explanation:

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<sup>33</sup> Liz Watson, "This Alum Sees Red Over Gold," *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 2005, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ashley Johnson, "Warriors still favored by several students, alumnus," *Journal Sentinel*, June 7, 2005, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Hirsley, "Heated War of Words over 'Warriors'; A \$2 Million Offer to Bring Back an Old, Some Say Offensive, Nickname is Dividing Marquette," *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 2004, <http://www.uillinois.edu/clips/december-8-2004.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Ryan Nakashima, "Marquette Opts to go with the Gold; Students, Many of Whom Wanted a Return to the Traditional Warriors, are Baffled," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 5, 2005, A2.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Baranowski, "Warriors Name Does Not Affect Diversity," *Marquette Tribune*, Jan 7, 2005, <http://marquettetribune.org/2005/01/27/viewpoints/warriors-name-does-not-affect-diversity/>.

“Gold” boldly represents Marquette’s proud athletic traditions such as Golden Avalanche, Golden Eagles and Gold Rush, the current student fan section for basketball games. It has also become the signature color for Marquette athletics worn proudly across the country by Marquette students, alumni and fans. In athletics, the mark of a champion is often a gold medal or trophy.<sup>38</sup>

In the same vein, Marquette University’s president, Rev. Wild, said, “I am really pleased that the Trustees have chosen this direction for Marquette athletics. The Board has chosen a name that reflects our desire to be champions.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, a spokesperson for the athletic department offered the following comment: “With one very simple, yet powerful word, the board has captured Marquette’s athletic tradition.”<sup>40</sup> Each of these statements suggests an understanding of a distinct identity of Marquette as an organization with a proud and successful athletic tradition.

### *Marquette as an Academic Institution*

While many alumni and students referenced the athletic identity of Marquette in their reactions to the nickname discussion, other community members spoke about the educational purposes of the university with greater frequency. For instance, President Wild reinforced the academic mission by saying, “Marquette University is first and foremost an academic institution committed to educating men and women as well as [to] having a faculty engaged in teaching and research. We must not lose sight of our mission.”<sup>41</sup> The board of trustees also issued a resolution at the beginning of the public discussion that indicated its focus on educating in terms of antibias instruction related to the selection of a mascot: “Marquette University shall strive to educate its students, alumni and fans as to the objectionable nature of such [Native American] references and imagery.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marquette Office of Marketing and Public Affairs, “Marquette ‘Gold’ Selected as New Athletics Nickname; New Athletics Monogram also Announced,” May 4, 2005, [http://www.ssar.org/news/items/2005/200505/20050504\\_MarquetteU.htm](http://www.ssar.org/news/items/2005/200505/20050504_MarquetteU.htm).

<sup>39</sup> Marquette Office of Marketing and Communication, “Marquette ‘Gold’ selected as new athletics nickname; new athletics monogram also announced,” May 4, 2005, [http://www.ssar.org/news/items/2005/200505/20050504\\_MarquetteU.htm](http://www.ssar.org/news/items/2005/200505/20050504_MarquetteU.htm).

<sup>40</sup> Will Ashemacher, “Going gold,” *Marquette Tribune*, Oct 5, 2005, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Brigid O’Brien, “Marquette Trustees to Continue Discussion of Athletics Nickname,” Marquette Office of Marketing and Communication, Dec 8, 2004, <http://www.marquette.edu/omc/newscenter/news/pr120804.shtml>.

<sup>42</sup> Marquette Office of Marketing and Communication, “Resolution of the Board of Trustees of Marquette University Prohibiting Native American References and Imagery,” Sept 22, 2004, <http://www.marquette.edu/omc/newscenter/news/nickres0904.shtml>.

Others commented on the theme of education, specifically related to diversity. One of the leaders of the region's intertribal council<sup>43</sup> said, "I cannot foresee how an institution, particularly an educational institution, can adequately or comfortably project on its letterheads and t-shirts images of American Indians."<sup>44</sup> Some Marquette faculty also spoke about their interpretation of the university's identity as being tied to a responsibility to teach to diversity. One English professor, for example, commented, "My fear is that on the first nationally televised game, you'll have people in the stands displaying Native American imagery in some way. And the public will perceive that the university endorses that."<sup>45</sup> An academic approach that focuses on diversity and which emphasizes the responsibility to educate all people is part of what distinguishes universities such as Marquette from other organizations.

In contrast to the athletic tradition of Marquette, which was rarely tied to any other aspect of Marquette's identity, the educational function of Marquette was seen as clearly tied to, though separate from, the faith mission. This link is seen particularly through its emphasis on social justice issues. Father Wild alluded to this overlap as he suggested, "We cannot teach one principle about respect for human dignity in our classrooms and then fail to act by that same principle when making our decisions."<sup>46</sup> A student made these same connections saying:

Combating ignorance is always an up-hill battle. This kind of education cannot be learned in class but must be sought in the appreciation and respect of culture. Christian tradition and human decency call all to do more, not less for others.<sup>47</sup>

Both of these comments represent a recognition that the academic function of Marquette is tied to its faith mission, which focuses on care for the whole person and which advocates respect for human dignity.

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<sup>43</sup> The Native American community is viewed as a key stakeholder in this case as the issue is tied to their history and heritage. We include them as a key stakeholder based on Freeman's broad definition that sees stakeholders as any group with the potential to be affected by or to affect the organization. See Edward R. Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston, MA: Pitman, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> Carol Slezak, "Marquette's Good Name at Stake as it Revisits Moniker," *Chicago Sun Times*, Sept 26, 2004, 116.

<sup>45</sup> Hirsley, "Heated War of Words," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Marquette Athletics, "Trustees Announce New Nickname Selection Process," May 11, 2005, <http://www.gomarquette.com/genrel/051105aaa.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Griffith Sellnow, "Pro-Warrior Prof Scolded," *Marquette Tribune*, Oct 5, 2005, <http://marquettetribune.org/2004/09/28/viewpoints/pro-warrior-prof-scolded/>.

### *Marquette as a Jesuit Catholic Institution*

While the Marquette administration can be seen to reference all three of the identities that emerged in the discussion of the university mascot and nickname, the most common references coming from the administration were tied to the Jesuit Catholic identity of the university. Many of these references came from university president, Rev. Wild. His comments included the following two statements:

[We must consider] whether or not Marquette should reinstate the Warriors as the athletics' nickname going forward, or whether we should honor it as part of our past history. In either case, we must and will choose a course that does not compromise our values and respect for the dignity of all members of our human family.<sup>48</sup>

We must remember that this decision is not about money. It is about tradition, pride, and respect for all members of the human community. Any final decision must reflect Marquette's Jesuit, Catholic values.<sup>49</sup>

Recognition of the faith-based identity of Marquette was not limited to the administration. Faculty members also spoke of the need to reject calls to return to the Warriors based on the social justice mission of Marquette. A letter signed by several faculty members included the following: "Our commitment to uphold the university's mission by promoting justice and diversity on campus, which is shared by many other faculty, staff, and administrators on campus, compels our opposition."<sup>50</sup> Students also spoke to the faith mission of Marquette with comments such as: "So Marquette University, let's not allow our bank accounts to determine our Catholic identity."<sup>51</sup> Taken together, these statements identify faith tradition as a key feature of Marquette's identity.

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<sup>48</sup> Don Walker, "Marquette Mulls Nickname," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 3, 2005, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Brigid O'Brien, "Board of Trustees to Talk Further About Athletic Name Change; University Declines \$2 Million Donation," Office of Public Affairs Newsroom: Press Release, May 17, 2004, <http://www.marquette.edu/omc/newscenter/news/pr51704.shtml>.

<sup>50</sup> Lindsey McKee, "Warriors Revisited," *Marquette Tribune*, Sept 21, 2005, 1 (Para.6), <http://marquettetribune.org/2004/09/21/news/warriors-revisited/>.

<sup>51</sup> Brent Bray, "'Warrior' symbol of negative imagery," *Marquette Tribune*, April 28, 2005, <http://marquettetribune.org/2005/04/28/viewpoints/warrior-symbol-of-negative-imagery/>.



*Stakeholder Participation and the Intersection of Multiple Identities*

The three identities that emerged in the negotiation and decision-making process surrounding the discussion of Marquette's mascot and athletic nickname are intriguing. The organization's practices and reflection on these practices reveal particular understandings of Marquette's organizational identity. Beyond the emergence of the three distinct identities, the process provides an illustration of how stakeholder participation influences organizational identity construction processes.<sup>52</sup> As Putnam argued, organizational members influence organizational identity just as much as the organization's official communication shapes the identity.<sup>53</sup>

This case demonstrates the extent to which stakeholder participation in decision-making processes can reveal organizational identities that may not reflect the exact intentions of organizational management. It seems the administration of Marquette sought to emphasize and construct an identity that focused on the Jesuit Catholic mission of the university. However, the various stakeholder groups focused on other aspects of the organization's identity and articulated their understanding of an organization that was distinct due to its athletic tradition or, in some cases, due to its academic and educational purposes.

While three distinct identities did emerge in the data analysis, one of the more compelling findings is the degree to which these identities were forced to come into contact with one another in this case. All of the stakeholder groups used appeals to a particular interpretation of Marquette's identity as a rationale and support for their positions. In the case of the academic identity and the Jesuit Catholic mission, the focus on social justice and diversity education complemented each other. However, for those who most explicitly referenced the athletic tradition, this type of blending was more challenging. While many stakeholders recognized the multiple identities associated with Marquette, analysis of the data suggests that many stakeholders did not see the link between the university's faith mission and the university's athletic program. The primary means by which such disconnect was revealed was in suggestions that Marquette was acting out of motivations of political correctness. One student made the disconnect clearer as he said, "How has this

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<sup>52</sup> Scott and Lane, "A Stakeholder Approach to Organizational Identity."

<sup>53</sup> Linda L. Putnam, "Negotiation and Organizing: Two Levels within the Weickian Model," *Communication Studies* 40 (1989): 249-257.

become a ‘social justice’ issue? Every time the MU community discusses a controversial issue, it becomes a ‘social justice’ issue, meaning holding opposing views are an affront to the ‘Catholic, Jesuit values.’<sup>54</sup> This comment represents what appeared to be a prevailing sentiment of those who advocated a return to Warriors. Simply stated, these stakeholders rejected the argument that this issue was tied to Marquette’s faith mission and, in effect, rejected the notion that Marquette’s identity was most directly tied to this faith mission.

### Managing Multiple Identities

We now consider the second research question: *How did Marquette University’s decision-making processes reflect a particular organizational identity management process?* Official university communications suggest that administrators sought to manage identity expectations throughout this decision-making process by establishing the university identity as centrally rooted in its faith tradition. University administrators made great efforts to include the voices of as many stakeholders as possible in the process and to include the perspective of all constituencies. However, the explanations for how the decision was made did not include a strong recognition of the multiple identities at play in this case. Whereas some of the stakeholder groups participating in this decision-making process suggested that they identified most directly with Marquette’s athletic and educational identity, the official university position seemed to indicate that the faith-based identity was always most relevant when making decisions. Following the resolution announcing that there would not be a return to Warriors, a university spokesperson explained that “this resolution makes it clear that we will not make any decisions that are in opposition to our Catholic, Jesuit values.”<sup>55</sup> Taking it a step further, Rev. Wild directly addressed claims of political correctness by appealing to the Christian roots of Marquette’s mission:

Sometimes ... people tell me that our sensitivity to the feelings ... of Native American people is simply capitulating in a supine way to “political correctness.” So let me say flatly to one and all that our concern in this matter is not due to any great love of political correctness, but of proper observance of one of

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<sup>54</sup> Brian Baranowski, “Warriors Name does not Affect Diversity,” *Marquette Tribune*, Oct 5, 2005, <http://marquettetribune.org/2005/01/27/viewpoints/warriors-name-does-not-affect-diversity/>.

<sup>55</sup> Lindsey McKee, “Board of Trustees to Reconsider Warrior,” *Marquette Tribune*, Sept 23, 2004, 1 (Para.6), <http://marquettetribune.org/2004/09/23/news/board-of-trustees-to-reconsider-warrior/>.

the two most basic commands that Jesus told us to observe, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." At Marquette University, as you will not be surprised to learn, we take seriously the teaching of the Gospels, and we will not consciously adopt policies or do things that are perceived by groups of people in our human family as patently offensive to them. To do otherwise would violate in a serious way our core identity as a Catholic and Jesuit university.<sup>56</sup>

What this and other comments suggest is that from the administrative standpoint, the faith-based mission was central to all decisions of the university. While there may be separate identities held by the organization, they all must intersect at the level of the faith tradition, which is at the heart of the university mission.

The three identities that emerged in this decision-making process do not inherently exist in tension; however, in this case, the focus on messages about identity coming from the university (administration) did not match the interpretations employed by all of the stakeholder groups (i.e., the administration framed their arguments in terms of Marquette having a particular Jesuit mission, whereas the alumni focused on Marquette embodying a proud and successful athletic tradition). In the end, many of the alumni and several students did not identify with the organizational identity that was emphasized by the university. Returning to Pratt and Foreman's responses to multiple identities provides some insight into this tension.<sup>57</sup> Prior to this nickname choice, Marquette operated in ways that largely held these three identity conceptions apart. However, when the nickname selection process began, the university appeared to argue from a standpoint in which all identities were seen to be interrelated and to represent the entire organization (i.e., the way the university managed its identity was to prioritize and emphasize the faith mission as relevant to all identity conceptions, without seeking to blend or merge these conceptions explicitly). Connections between academics and athletics, or the Jesuit mission and academics, were common; however, the athletic tradition had never been explicitly blended with the Jesuit mission of the institution in a consistent way.

Marquette, like other Jesuit institutions, has given attention to how the academic and Jesuit identities speak to one another.<sup>58</sup> However, limited attention has been given to the intersection of the athletic identity with

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<sup>56</sup> Robert A. Wild, "A letter from Rev. Robert A. Wild, S.J., Regarding Athletic Nicknames," Marquette Office of Public Affairs, June 21, 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Pratt and Foreman, "Classifying Managerial Responses."

<sup>58</sup> See Board of the Jesuit Conference, *Communal Reflection on the Jesuit Mission in Higher Education: A Way of Proceeding* (Society of Jesus in the United States, Washington, DC: May 2002).

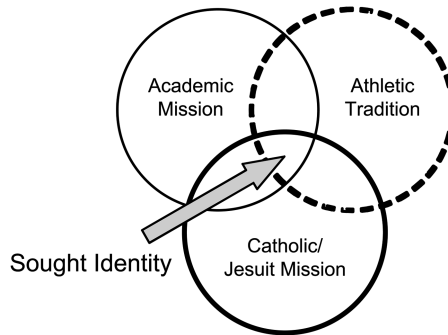


Fig. 1.<sup>59</sup> Overlapping Identities

either the Jesuit or the academic identity. The vast majority of discussion on the subject holds these identities separately. In this case, the university, by defining itself and establishing an organizational identity through its nickname choice, invoked its faith mission, which is most directly associated with its Jesuit identity. The tension that emerged is due to the fact that two of the most vocal stakeholder groups did not appear to accept the association of Marquette’s Jesuit identity with its athletic identity.

In response to this tension, we offer a model for visualizing the interaction of identities and the associated identification processes (see Fig. 1). This model acknowledges the existence of separate yet overlapping identities. When considering this particular case, this model highlights the situation in which the organization focuses its identity-construction discourse on the area of overlap while primary stakeholder groups do not identify with this “space of discourse.” Instead, stakeholder groups identify with the nonoverlapping regions of the athletic identity as a target for identification.

This case, as represented in this model, shows that simply focusing on the same identity target will not lead to greater agreement on identity criteria. Attention needs to be given to what *particular* aspects or attributes of a target resonate with the various stakeholders.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This examination of the decision-making process surrounding the Marquette University nickname provides new insight into the complexities

<sup>59</sup> The size of the circles is not intended to reflect the relative importance of each identity. Rather, the model depicts the degree to which each conception of identity interacts with the others.

of managing a faith mission within a context of multiple organizational identities and stakeholder perspectives. In seeking to understand the role of stakeholders within the identity-construction processes, it is not sufficient simply to acknowledge that stakeholder groups have different perspectives and identify with different targets. This analysis suggests that focusing exclusively on mission as a shared organizational identity target only when making key decisions is inadequate for fostering strong identification. Rather, attention needs to be given to the particular aspects of an identity structure that are most salient to mission in a consistent and ongoing fashion.

Marquette's consideration of a potential name change demonstrates that the blending of faith-based ideals with secular purposes can be tenuous. This study reveals the extent to which some stakeholders can compartmentalize the faith identity from other aspects of the university. When this happens, decision-making premises rooted in the faith tradition may fall flat with stakeholders who are not connecting these identities.

### *Limitations*

The findings of this study are limited in that they rely exclusively on publicly available accounts of stakeholder perspectives. Greater understanding of stakeholder perspectives could be gained by extending this study to include in-depth interviews with representatives of the various stakeholder groups. The use of media accounts also contributes to a second limitation; some stakeholder groups are represented with more or less frequency than others. While the themes and interpretations still allow for fruitful discussion of stakeholder groups, the themes for some of these groups are difficult to determine based on the small number of accounts from these groups. Because of this, we cannot generalize these claims to all stakeholders. Rather, we offer claims and interpretations based on this particular group of stakeholders.

### *Implications*

Despite these limitations, this study yielded a number of findings that point toward theoretical implications and specific practical applications. This study contributes to and extends current discussion about the management of multiple organizational identities by focusing on the intersection of multiple identities. Further, the study suggests that Catholic universities seeking to develop effective means to com-

municate mission would be well served by considering organizational theories that focus on mission and identity. Employing Pratt and Foreman's<sup>60</sup> scheme for classifying managerial responses to the presence of multiple organizational identities would suggest that the Marquette University administration chose an appropriate strategy. The administrative response leading up to the events surrounding this case was one of compartmentalization, as all three identities were kept apart. This strategy caused conflict when an issue emerged that forced the three to come together. This study suggests that these responses should be revisited to consider ways in which organizational leaders can incorporate strategic planning and future-oriented perspectives.

On a pragmatic level, this study points out possible pitfalls for Catholic universities as they seek to communicate mission and identity to multiple stakeholder groups. The findings in this study highlight the degree to which university leaders need to be cognizant of the many stakeholder groups seeking to identify with the university. Actively seeking to understand the perspective of stakeholder groups and how these groups identify with different identity targets can provide insight into strategies for structuring dialogues that will resonate with these groups.<sup>61</sup> In particular, organizational leaders need to account for the personal experience that stakeholders attach to their views of the university. This case reveals the extent to which stakeholder memories of their organizational experience color their interpretation of the organization's identity.

Perhaps the most direct recommendation that we can make based on our findings is that Catholic universities need to be strategic in their presentation of multiple identities, and to anticipate future situations that may shift priorities. In this case, the three identities of the organization were largely held apart. Athletics were not considered in light of the Jesuit mission and *vice versa*. This arrangement created, for the various Marquette stakeholders, particular organizational experiences and expectations. When the discussion of the Marquette name change was introduced, the administration sought to prioritize the Jesuit identity. Because this strategy had not been employed previously, many of the stakeholders were unable to accept this emphasis, or to identify

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<sup>60</sup>Pratt and Foreman, "Classifying Managerial Responses."

<sup>61</sup>Certainly, university officials did consider the stakeholder perspectives. However, it seems that they did not focus on the degree to which stakeholder groups were orienting to different aspects of the organizational identity. Due to these differences, not all stakeholder groups saw arguments resting on the Jesuit, Catholic identity as compelling.



with this articulation of a Marquette identity. If the Jesuit identity is to be the overarching priority for the university, the university may be well served to focus its attention consistently upon conveying such a message.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of Marquette's nickname decision highlights the complexity of addressing the issue of labels and signifiers for Catholic universities' identities. While Catholic universities in general have made great strides in communicating their faith-based identity to students, alumni, and staff, this study suggests that administrators would do well to consider carefully the many identities and stakeholders associated with the university. Further study is needed to explore the many ways in which the mission might be discussed in relation to issues that extend beyond athletics. Despite this recognition that further study is needed, this study does allow us to answer the question, "What's in a name?" An organizational name is bound up in questions of mission, stakeholder participation, experience, and its identification with multiple organizational identities.

