A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT MESSAGES AND
PRACTICES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA AND ELON UNIVERSITY

By

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INTRODUCTION

For several decades, scholars have been concerned about the decline of political and civic participation among United States citizens (Harriger & McMillan, 2007). Declining voter participation, cynicism about the political landscape of the nation, and a lack of knowledge among citizens confirm a poor report concerning the health of the American democracy. This decline is particularly evident in young people (Harriger & McMillan, 2007). The 2000 Higher Education Research Institute annual survey of college freshmen showed even more evidence of this trend. The report found that student interest was at an all-time low for the election year (Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney, 2001). The events of September 11, 2001, prompted many students to become more civically involved. However, interest in political engagement was still only half of what it was for young people when these surveys began in the 1960s (Rooney, 2003).

In the past couple of decades, colleges and universities have been urged to take a leadership role in meeting the global society’s problems and challenges. In 1982, Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, stated, “There is no reason for universities to feel uncomfortable in taking account of society’s needs; in fact, they have a clear obligation to do so” (Jacoby, 2009, p.301). In 1994, Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, directly challenged universities to “respond to the challenges that confront our children, our schools, and our cities, just as the land-grant colleges responded to the needs of agriculture and industry a century ago” (Jacoby, 2009). These two men, along with civic engagement scholars Harry Boyte and Elizabeth Hollander, initiated the most recent call to action for civic engagement in higher education by bringing attention to the necessity of colleges upholding their civic
missions. Boyte and Hollander claimed, “Whereas universities were once centrally concerned with ‘education for democracy’ and ‘knowledge for society,’ today’s institutions have often drifted from their civic mission” (Genereux & Huntsberger, 1999, p. 27).

Civic learning involves developing the awareness of the condition of the community, realizing the problems it faces, and appreciating the opportunity in diversity within the community (Jacoby, 2009). This opportunity for diversity includes multicultural collaborations and partnerships among various groups to benefit the larger community. According to Thomas Erlich, senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, civic engagement should aim to enhance community life and work to resolve community concerns through thoughtful and intentional collaboration (Jacoby, 2009). Through the years, national studies show Americans are not learning what they need to know to be civically engaged. Because of this shortcoming, this thesis analyzes the rhetoric of civic engagement at two universities modeling best practices and evaluates trends by exploring ways to re-establish civic renewal. The University of Virginia and Elon are demonstrating best practices in civic engagement, and as a result, their students are likely to become civically engaged after having a positive experience in college.

Civic engagement is vital to the future of the country, and I recognize the importance college students must place on their individual role as contributing citizens. I believe a student’s development during the college years is vital to the growth of his/her sense of civic responsibility and awareness. Since the ages of 18-22 are so formative, my study focuses on the messages universities promote to their students to persuade them to
be civically engaged during their college years. I argue that universities are the place where students learn citizenship and develop the skills necessary to be useful members of their communities. I investigate what universities are doing to prepare citizens since what the students do during their time in college has a strong impact on their values later in life. I also argue that specific universities tell stories that portray the values of commitment to others and the importance of connecting what is taught in the classroom with civic action. I believe these stories are important because they foster productive citizenship. Through these stories, students create a specific relationship to the school’s tradition, pride, and values and the universities become a space for students to grow and transform into thoughtful, engaged and committed members of their communities.

John Henry Newman, a British 1800s philosopher, however, believed university students should think for themselves in isolation during their college experience. He raised powerful questions about the role of universities in preparing students as contributing members of their society. He asked how the university should balance quality education and equality of opportunity, an issue that is still interesting within the framework of democracy in the United States. In his work, he also asked how the university should serve as both a preserver of the past and as agent of change for the future. The three basic themes of Newman’s approach were to create a university that promoted, 1) knowledge as an end itself, to be pursued for its own sake and not for utilitarian value, 2) a community of scholars and teachers who teach students the importance of truth, and 3) the advancement of the humanities, the highest attainment of cultivated minds (Newman, 1907). He believed students should aim to think clearly and without interruption to create the best thoughts possible. He challenged students to read
books and explore the world for themselves. His vision for the liberal arts institution left a significant impression on higher education reformers of his time. The debate about the role of universities and their ability to prepare students both as thinkers and practitioners is still relevant today, but I argue that these two tasks are not in opposition to each other. Universities encourage students to be active citizens not in opposition to Newman’s model of thinking in isolation, but rather by complimenting it through the promotion of self-reflective civic engagement practices. These activities push students to think about their role in the larger community as they explore an active mode of citizenship and ‘practice’ their skills while in college, as they reflect on what they may do after they graduate.

Giambattista Vico was another philosopher and rhetorician that taught about the importance of citizens going to school to learn and grow. Vico argued that a humanistic education is based on learning and thinking, and not for a specific purpose (Vico, 1993). Rather, he believed students should grow, imagine, create, and understand the topics that matter most before critiquing them. Following his model, the university becomes a preparatory space where students think, learn and master the skills to be effective citizens in the future. Their personal growth is vital to their capability to understand and act upon important matters, and the university provides opportunities for the students to create and expand their capabilities to be thoughtful and productive members of society. The understanding of the university as a preparatory place of learning for future civic engagement sets the tone for this study. This time of training and transition allows students to master their citizenship skills. This study seeks to link the importance of
universities as preparatory spaces for students to the way this call to action prompts students to be civically engaged after leaving college.

Because of a lack of participation and enthusiasm among young people concerning civic activity, I find importance in conducting a study that explores the civic engagement rhetoric at two American universities that place high priority on civic engagement. For the purposes of this study, I analyze specific texts that promote and encourage civic engagement at the University of Virginia and Elon University. These institutions are very different in size and historical background, yet both have a record of high performance in civic engagement among students through varied volunteer experiences and service opportunities. I selected these two schools based on proximity, civic engagement excellence, and accessibility. As a student at Wake Forest University, I am conveniently located close to both universities. Both these schools have received local, state, and national recognition for outstanding civic engagement models and practices, including both schools’ placement on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. I also believe the contrast between the two schools is valuable to my study. The sizes, demographics, and historical backgrounds of these schools greatly differ, and these differences will enhance my analysis of the civic engagement rhetoric presented to students.

Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm is the method I will use for this study. In his 1984 book *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Fisher asserts the importance of good arguments and the importance of narration. Fisher argues that all communication is a form of storytelling and defines humans as *homo narrans*. According to him, stories are the most powerful way to reach
an audience. Fisher provides two evaluative concepts for stories, narrative coherence and fidelity, and argues that the intended audience members judge narratives based on their own experiences (Fisher, 1989). Coherence refers to the ability to make sense of the message and the way a story resonates with the audience so they can initiate action or a change in beliefs. Fidelity refers to how the message “rings true” to the audience through past experiences and knowledge (Fisher, 1989). Values, according to Fisher, are what make stories persuasive. They convince audiences to reinforce what they already believe or to accept new ideas that “make sense” because they resonate with their own values.

Fisher’s narrative paradigm is closely related to Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification and consubstantiality, as humans use values to relate to others “like” them. When the connection is not there, stories can appeal to transcendent values that may “ring true” differently for various audiences, but still create a sense of unification. In the introduction of *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke begins with a question: “What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?” (p. xv). Burke observes that any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answer to the questions: “what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)” (Burke, 1945, p. xv). I rely on these philosophies to analyze how the University of Virginia and Elon University are preparing effective citizens for the future. I will use these theories to analyze the text by focusing on specific values to evaluate the stories.

Since I am focusing on the stories told by universities to their students, this analysis seeks to link the study of citizenship and participation by analyzing the stories both of these universities tell to their campus community. I argue that UVa’s and Elon’s
rhetorical messages to students are important because they focus on the values of commitment to others and the connection of classroom learning to civic participation. I believe civic engagement and the efforts these universities are making to prepare their students are important to analyze because these messages promote building communities and expand students’ perceptions of themselves and the world around them during their college years.

To date, most civic programs want to develop a sense of involvement, investment, or responsibility with regard to some group or context (Jacoby, 2009). Being informed and knowledgeable about local, national, and world affairs is necessary, as is an understanding of the workings of democratic processes (Lawry et al., 2006). Barbara Jacoby, in her book, *Civic Engagement in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, argues that civic engagement involves one or more of the following:

- Learning from others, self, and environment to develop informed perspectives on social issues
- Valuing diversity and building bridges across difference
- Behaving and working through controversy with civility
- Taking an active role in the political process
- Participating actively in public life, public problem solving and community service
- Assuming leadership and membership roles in organizations
- Developing empathy, ethics, values, and sense of social responsibility
- Promoting social justice locally and globally

(Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership, 2005)

For the purposes of this study, the accepted definition of civic engagement is: Acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities, which include campus, local, state, national, and global communities. Civic engagement includes such activities as developing informed perspectives on social issues, working with others to solve public problems, taking an active role in the political process, advocating for
policies that address issues of concern, and, of course, engaging directly in activities that meet human and community needs (Jacoby, 2009).
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Preparing effective citizens has been at the core of some American universities. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson both valued the reformation of higher education to be more responsive to the needs of citizens in the country. These American leaders, according to Lawry, considered informed and responsible participation, at least by qualified men, essential to the success of the democratic experiment (Lawry et al., 2006). Colonial colleges taught classics and piety until university presidents like Yale’s Ezra Stiles emphasized debate topics related to independence (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt, 2005). After the Revolutionary War, the focus of higher education slowly began to shift from the preparation of the individual to the construction of a new nation (Jacoby, 2009). The Land-Grant Act passed in 1862 allowed institutions to link public higher education with the concept of civic engagement, as it relates to industry and agriculture (Jacoby, 2009).

John Dewey has quite possibly been the single most influential leader for the civic role in higher education. His vision for civic engagement specifically relates to the liberal arts curriculum in higher education. In Democracy and Education, he argued that the liberal arts course of study should consist of “three essential elements: it should engage students in the surrounding community; it should be focused on the problems to be solved rather than academic discipline; and it should collaboratively involve students and faculty” (as cited in Lawry et al., 2006, p. 145). Dewey’s emphasis on these three elements demonstrates the vital role universities must play in creating and equipping productive citizens.
Because the college years are a crucial period of time for students to develop and act upon their personal values, the ability to attract students to become part of civic-minded activities is essential. One example is President Franklin Roosevelt. He was innovative and sparked interest among students to serve as consultants for community outreach. During World War II, universities worked closely with the government to combat national problems, such as education reform (Jacoby, 2009). Through these efforts, the G.I. Bill and the National Science Foundation were formed. Following these events, the creation of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 linked higher education with the security of our country (Jacoby, 2009). The Peace Corps in 1961 and the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in 1965, created new opportunities for college students to became more involved with community service (Jacoby, 2009). The YMCA, 4-H, Scouting movement, fraternities and sororities, and various other programs comprised most of the opportunities for students to get involved (Jacoby, 1996). All of these advancements led to the creation of the pedagogy called “service-learning.”

Service-learning combined community service with academic study (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999). In 1978, the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education was formed by blending groups for various field experiences through education and service internships (Jacoby, 2009). Growing apathy in the 1980s yielded concerns that yet again sparked action among scholars insistent on civic engagement. Richard Morrill challenged scholars to focus on education for civic engagement that combined knowledge and action, for “the empowerment of persons and the cultivation of minds” (Cooperative Education Association, 1991, p. 56). Notably, Campus Compact was created in 1985 by college and university presidents who pledged to encourage and
support education in service of civic responsibility. They thought the “me generation” needed to contribute positively to society. Currently, Campus Compact has over eleven hundred presidents as members (Jacoby, 2009). Through the efforts of the National Society for Experiential Education, Campus Compact, and the Campus Outreach Opportunity League, community service and service-learning grew significantly on campuses throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Jacoby, 2009).

The history of civic engagement in higher education institutions in the United States can be traced back many decades. However, most scholars agree the creation of Campus Compact the mid-1980s was the beginning of civic engagement in higher education. University leaders wanted students to have a wide variety of opportunities for community service both on and off their respective college campuses to promote civic engagement as a high priority of institutional agendas. In the past, preparing civic leaders had been part of many mission statements; however, the rhetoric of these mission statements did not match the efforts toward civic engagement on campuses throughout the United States. Colleges and universities were falling short of their missions by not facilitating enough creative learning and service opportunities for students. In the 1990s, the broken link between civic engagement and curriculum was joined by the incorporation of service-learning. Before then, it had been hard for campus faculty and staff to promote the ideals of civic engagement without academic incentives or ways to incorporate service learning in the curriculum (Jacoby, 2009).

The National and Community Service Act in 1990, which was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, authorized the Commission on National and Community Service. In 1993, the National and Community Service Trust Act created the Corporation
for National and Community Service. This program organized interested Americans in service opportunities suitable to their interests. Programs include AmeriCorps, USA Freedom Corps, and Learn and Serve America (Jacoby, 2009). National and institutional research has revealed that service-learning is best when it combines service with academic content and reflection (Jacoby, 2009). This model provides a foundation to develop and acknowledge the source of problems while creating solutions, such as a targeted citizenship education program for students who are supposed to remain engaged throughout their lifetime. In the 1990s, major civic engagement initiatives continued to develop throughout the country. In late 1995, Robert Putnam published, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.” In this article, he explained that social capital had eroded in the United States. Social capital concerns the value and relationship of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging among diverse people while including norms of reciprocity (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). Because of his criticism for the lack of so-called “civic engagement,” he sparked an interest in advocates to do something about this trend.

The rise of service-learning, engaged scholarship, and campus/community partnerships spurred by Putnam and others raised awareness and encouraged higher education leaders to rededicate colleges and universities to a higher standard of achievement (Jacoby, 2009). This movement has both national and international implications and benefits. Currently, the University of Virginia and Elon University are creatively encouraging civic engagement models into their own unique higher education experiences through specific majors, minors, and extracurricular experiences.
The establishment and growth of civic engagement through the decades set the stage for this study. The stories told by the University of Virginia and Elon University urge students to answer a call to action, and this rhetorical analysis seeks to uncover how these messages cultivate citizenship among college students. This thesis explores current civic engagement practices, initiatives, and communication strategies at the University of Virginia and Elon University. At both universities, I will analyze mission statements, mottos, institutes for research, and websites.

Understanding the historical background and the priority on civic engagement at the University of Virginia and Elon University is important for the purposes of this study. The leadership of both universities has played an immense role in promoting civic engagement among students, and this focus demonstrates the belief of university officials that the college years are critical for shaping values regarding citizenship. In the past, colonial colleges had been “seminaries of sedition,” land-grant institutions are “people’s colleges, and junior colleges found “true identity in community” (Harriger and McMillan, 2007, p. 14). I look at how these institutions have transformed throughout the years to become model schools for civic engagement while studying how they define themselves today. In fact, it is important to remember that higher education was once itself a civic movement. I believe in the importance of civic engagement and the difference true implantation of such initiatives can have for a campus and the greater community. By studying these two specific universities, I intend to reveal how their civically-engaged practices are creating college graduates with strong desires to be contributing citizens for a lifetime.
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

The principles of civic engagement date back to Aristotle. He argued that citizenship is a practice, a habit that must be learned (Aristotle, 1941). Aristotle’s focus on personal motivation and involvement are the two specific pillars of his model of citizenship. As the very first advocate of participatory citizenship, Aristotle argued that citizens must have an investment in the government. Because of this, they are positioned to deliberate and make decisions about what influences their personal lives. I will use his model of citizenship to underpin my work and provide historical grounding to the role of a college student as a citizen.

Aristotle’s model of participatory democracy motivates all citizens to share in the deliberative well-being of the government. Simply defined, participatory democracy aims to create opportunities for members of a political group to contribute to decision-making within the group (Aristotle, 1941). Deliberation sparks action, and this is the intended goal of his ideal. According to Aristotle, citizens need to cultivate the habit of citizenship in order to contribute to society and take action when necessary (Aristotle, 1941). In Politics, he defined citizen as “a person who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office” (Aristotle, 1941, p. 455). The Athenian system allowed for citizens to be directly involved in governing. Furthermore, he defined the city-state as a “multitude of such citizens which is adequate for a self-sufficient life” (Aristotle, 1941, pgs. 20-21).

The tension between the public and the private spheres and the responsibilities of citizens concerning engagement are central to the work of Hannah Arendt. Deeply indebted to the Aristotelian model and his visions of an active citizenry, Arendt argued that words and actions are essential to citizenship (Arendt, 1958). She believed the
human condition of plurality to be the foundation on which the public realm is constructed. A public life, for Arendt, is necessary as what she called the *vita activa*, “the proper place for human excellence” (Arendt, 1958, p. 34). The public realm is opposed to the private sphere and Arendt suggested that “a man who lived only a private life, was not fully human” (Arendt, 1958, p. 38). Arendt’s theories on the importance of words and actions while participating in the public sphere support a model based on civic engagement, where students act in the public space of the university and their community and use words and actions to motivate others to act and to fight together for causes that impact those involved.

Arendt’s focus on the *vita activa* as the only place for excellence remains an influential model of active citizenship. This ideal citizen is what universities like the University of Virginia and Elon University encourage their students to become by answering a call to action and engaging in various opportunities for civic activity. This moment of impellation is essential to what Maurice Charland defines as constitutive rhetoric. According to Charland, an effective rhetor gives members of the “constitutive audience” a reason to be part of that audience (Charland, 1987).

The ideal of the Greek *agora*, the public space for citizens to come together and discuss matters important to all, has remained influential. Through time, other scholars have elaborated on the ideal of the public sphere. The work of Jurgen Habermas enhances the “bigger picture” of a college student and the role he/she plays in the world, outside of the smaller confines of their role as a student on campus. Habermas formulated a model for open discussion through using “public reason” as a catalyst to serve as a check on state power. He believed that European culture was dominated by a “representational”
culture, where parties sought to control their followers by overwhelming the country’s subjects through extreme measures. According to Habermas, a variety of reasons resulted in the eventual disintegration of the public sphere. These reasons included the growth of a commercial mass media and the welfare state (Habermas, 1989). The commercial mass media turned the critical public into a passive consumer public, and the welfare state merged the state with society, and thus the public sphere was eliminated (Habermas, 1989). The public sphere became corrupted by self-interests and was no longer a place for the development of public-minded individuals.

The influences of earlier thinkers have shaped modern-day civic engagement initiatives and practices. Currently, civic engagement includes a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participation in building civil society, and benefiting the common good. Civic engagement also encompasses the notions of global citizenship and interdependence. Through civic engagement, individuals-- as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world-- are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world” (Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership, 2005, p. 9). Civic learning outcomes should be understood for the successful implementation of civic engagement.

There are inherent challenges in defining civic engagement in higher education. The term can relate to both individuals and institutions, but for the purpose of this project, the accepted definition relates to educating students to be effective citizens. The definition of civic engagement is constantly expanding and being redefined by scholars, and its implications have changed throughout the history and evolution of the topic. In this definition, Jacoby (2009) highlights other words commonly used related to civic
engagement: “social capital,” “citizenship,” “democratic participation,” “public work,” “social responsibility,” “social justice,” “community building,” “public agency,” and “civic leadership” (Battistoni, 2002; Levine, 2007). There are also challenges related to the political foundations of defining civic engagement. For example, “Faculty on the left complain that citizenship education tends to convey images of patriotic flag-waving. More conservative faculty see civic engagement as masking a leftist, activist agenda” (Jacoby, 2009, p. 10). The relationship between civic engagement and social justice is also important to understand. Should the pursuit of civic engagement be to create a socially-just world? “Community service” and “civic engagement” are often defined as the same term. Others consider these terms to be very different.

These issues frame the need for a concise definition to understand the foundation of civic engagement at a particular institution. In the journal article, “College Learning for the New Global Century,” the Association of American Colleges and Universities states, “In a democracy that is diverse, globally engaged, and dependent on citizen responsibilities, all students need an informed concern for the larger good because nothing less will renew our fractured and diminished commons” (National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise, 2007, p. 215). Barry Checkoway, in “Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University” (2001), wrote:

Education for citizenship becomes more complex in a diverse democratic society in which communication is not “monocultural,” consisting of people who share the same social and cultural characteristics but “multicultural,” with significant differences among groups. For democracy to function successfully in the future, students must be prepared to understand their own identities, communicate with
people who are different from themselves, and build bridges across cultural differences in the transition to a more diverse society. (p. 127)

National collegiate organizations have recently recognized the impact of service-learning opportunities for college students. Mortar Board National Honor Society, a distinguished honor society for college seniors, recognizes students who demonstrate superior aspects in scholarship, leadership, and service. The Mortar Board national office recently released a publication highlighting service-learning as a facet of civic engagement that has become more visible in recent years. Nationwide growth of various programs through the years has resulted in the advancement of service-learning actions in innovative programming throughout American college campuses (Lee, 2010). Service-learning allows learning to extend beyond the classroom walls. It allows students to engage in the notion of service while promoting personal growth (Lee, 2010).

In this article from Mortar Board, Lee claims that service-learning also expands one’s horizons to include perspectives that benefit humankind as a whole. Service-learning education diminishes selfishness and narrow-mindedness. Lee believes colleges and universities hoping to improve their service-learning programs on campus must first identify the mission, goals, and category of service-learning their program hopes to establish and maintain (Lee, 2010). Students must be challenged to think critically, form strong cognitive skills, and improve interpersonal communication skills to shape their individual leadership abilities by using a strong moral compass and ethics. Lee makes a strong point concerning the need for service-learning in college classrooms.

Today, many leading scholars in the field of communication are exploring the academic component of students participating in civic engagement. Their work further
promotes the importance of civic engagement studies and research. For example, James Hikins and Richard Cherwitz write about the implementation of civic engagement practices and the role of communication theory. Hikins and Cherwitz promote the idea of rhetorical perspectivism as a theoretical foundation crucial to proposing solutions to real-world challenges concerning engagement. The stories told by universities lead to action, and these practices guide students to become effective citizens. Their study looks at the current trends in academe and problems that exist with the implementation of engagement practices. Hikins and Cherwitz believe that “rhetorical perspectivism unites ‘thinking’ (reflection) and ‘doing’ (action), enabling scholars to leverage knowledge for social good” (Hikins and Cherwitz, 2010, p. 1). They link the resources of academic intellectual pursuits with the solution-forming process to answer the call to action to be more civically-minded citizens.

Students are constantly targeted with messages promoting values of active citizenship. Students are urged, through text, messages, and conversations, to become involved in activities on campus to respond to a call beyond themselves. In addition to analyzing the University of Virginia and Elon University, I intend to use examples and supporting evidence from other universities, too. The University of Alabama, my undergraduate institution, and Wake Forest University, the institution where I am currently studying, both tell similar stories of civic engagement. I will also discuss site visits and interviews with leaders on each campus to gain a local, personal perspective of the use and construction of the stories used. I will analyze the similarities in the stories these universities tell to promote the values I identify as commitment to others and a
making a connection between classroom teaching and civic action represented in those narratives about civic engagement.
CHAPTER ONE: THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

The University of Virginia, founded in 1819, is located in Charlottesville, Virginia. Since its founding by Thomas Jefferson, the institution has rested on his principles and high ideals of democracy and citizenship. Today, the influence of President Jefferson is evident through programs such as Jefferson Public Citizens, the Madison House (named after James Madison), and other civic engagement initiatives. After a recent visit to campus, I was able to see the goals and scope of the initiatives present on campus and in the community of Charlottesville. The University of Virginia does not have an official motto, but the institution’s front gate has this inscription:

“...here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.”

This is an excerpt from a letter Jefferson wrote to William Roscoe about the growing university. In this letter, Jefferson also stated, "This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind" (Monticello website). Here, the undertones of civic participation and one’s ownership and involvement in the larger world are confirmed in the beliefs of the founders. President Jefferson felt very strongly about the pursuit of truth and the moral obligation to do so. Jefferson claimed that truth must be both acknowledged and acted upon, not stifled or hidden. By encouraging truth and following it “where it may lead,” Jefferson modeled active citizenship by encouraging the pursuit of truth. In turn, this action promotes the values of commitment to others and application of classroom scholarship.

The University of Virginia begins to tell a story literally as students and visitors enter the front gate. The pursuit of truth is an underlying burden to carry as a student at UVa. Not all students will choose to accept the call to action, but those who do are
supposed to know that it is the will of the institution to create effective citizens ready and prepared to contribute positively to today’s society.

The University’s homepage offers a quick explanation of the history of UVa:

The University of Virginia is distinctive among institutions of higher education. Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, the University sustains the ideal of developing, through education, leaders who are well-prepared to help shape the future of the nation. The University is public, while nourished by the strong support of its alumni. It is also selective; the students who come here have been chosen because they show the exceptional promise Jefferson envisioned.

Students are expected to uphold and “fit into” a certain mold. The pursuit of citizenship is important and students are challenged to believe in the teachings and beliefs of President Jefferson. University of Virginia students are prompted as freshmen to be civically engaged throughout their collegiate careers. Students are exposed to these stories, and the reliability and truthfulness of UVa’s values are reflected in the rhetorical messages. These stories have what Fisher calls fidelity. They are consistent with what students are supposed to value and trust when they enter the university and they reinforce those same values as the ones UVa holds most dear.

The founding of the University has shaped UVa as we know it today. Jefferson desired for the University to be publicly-supported and have “national character and stature” (UVA website). He dreamed of a University that educated students in how to lead in practical affairs and public service rather than only to teach and have a career. His model for higher education was the first nonsectarian university in the United States. He was involved in every detail of creating UVa. For example, Jefferson oversaw planning the curriculum, recruiting the first faculty, and designing the Academical Village, and he went to extreme measure to see the university succeed after a long career
in politics. Even then, Jefferson sought to include multiple voices and perspectives in his unique forethought of what American higher education should look like at the time. These voices included notable government officials and education reformers. His willingness to include a diverse crowd reflects his commitment to democracy. When President Jefferson sought to create the University, he wished:

   To establish in the upper country of Virginia, and more centrally for the State, a University on a plan so broad and liberal and modern, as to be worth patronizing with the public support, and be a temptation to the youth of other States to come and drink of the cup of knowledge and fraternize with us. (UVa website)

In 1802, he was serving as President of the United States. Jefferson informed artist Charles Willson Peale that his concept of the new university would be "on the most extensive and liberal scale that our circumstances would call for and our faculties meet" (UVa website). At the time, Virginia was already home to another university, the College of William & Mary, but Jefferson lost confidence over time in his alma mater because of differing opinions with school officials. With James Madison alongside him, Marquis de Lafayette toasted Jefferson as the official father of the University at the school’s inaugural banquet in 1824.

Jefferson’s writings on education also show his belief that the nation and its citizens would be better if everyone had a basic education. In his autobiography, he stated, "The less wealthy people... by the bill for a general education, would be qualified to understand their rights, to maintain them, and to exercise with intelligence their parts in self-government; and all this would be affected without the violation of a single natural
right of any one individual citizen” (Jefferson, 1821, p. 50). He also suggested, "In a republican nation whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance” (Jefferson, 1821, p. 664). His belief in the democratic process, coupled with his desire to see higher education flourish, became a powerful foundation for the role of civic engagement at the University of Virginia.

Jefferson was very closely involved in shaping the values of the University. He often hosted Sunday dinners at his personal residence, Monticello, until his death. He fostered a sense of community among campus leaders, faculty, and students. In fact, when he died, he requested that his legacy be remembered in three ways: as author of the Declaration of Independence and Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and father of the University of Virginia. He did not even want to be remembered as President of the United States because he sought so hard to garner respect for his model of higher education in the United States (Monticello website). Two other American Presidents, James Madison and James Monroe, led the University of Virginia in its early years. The traditions of American democracy were near and dear to the heart of the institutional mission then as they are today.

When the American Civil War began, the University of Virginia was the largest institution of higher education in the southern part of the United States, second only to Harvard University. The University was able to remain open throughout the war, even though Virginia was the site of more battlegrounds than any other state. Union troops did invade campus, yet General Custer’s troops were forced to depart four days after they entered Charlottesville.
In 1904, Edwin Alderman resigned as President of Tulane University to take the same position at the University of Virginia. At UVa, he led the reform for one of the first school-sponsored financial aid programs throughout institutions of higher education. Though it seems basic by today’s standard, the program offered loan opportunities for “needy young men” who were unable to pay for their education. At first, the program idea was highly controversial and was opposed by many other leaders on campus. However, his idea withstood heavy criticism and became his signature contribution during his tenure as president of the institution (UVa website).

In 2004, the University of Virginia became the first public university in America to receive more of its funding from private sources than from the state where it is located. Because of this, the university has much greater autonomy over its personal affairs. Notably in 2004, on the 100th anniversary of Alderman becoming president, the university unveiled a plan for the AccessUVa financial aid program. This innovative program guarantees the University will meet and assist with 100% of a student's demonstrated need as requested. The program also provides low-income students (up to 200% of the poverty line – as of 2009, about $44,000 for a family of four) with full funds to cover all of their educational needs. This program is the very first to guarantee full grants to students of low-income families at any public university in the United States. This program demonstrates strong commitment by the school to fund students’ academic endeavors at such a quality institution.

The university was mainly all-white until 1950 and generally all-male. However, today, the campus is more diverse. Sarah Patton Boyle, author of the classic book, *The
Desegregated Heart (1962), tells her personal account of integration at UVa. She was a faculty wife and civil rights activist who worked very closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This rich history still influences the way in which the administration, the students and the faculty address controversial issues in the United States, including racial tensions and the creation of financial aid legislation. In 2006, UVa joined Harvard University and Princeton University to end their Early Decision and Early Action programs. The grounds for this decision included the unfairness it presents to poor and middle class students competing against students from more affluent backgrounds. Recently, early action has been reinstated for the Class of 2016. The program has since been altered and does have the financial regulations and restrictions that it formerly had before 2006.

These important times in UVa’s history have helped shape and confirm the current message through the promotion of values, such as commitment to others and active citizenship to UVa students. On campus, many student organizations also offer civic engagement opportunities on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. For example, the Madison House organizes nineteen service programs serving the needs of the Charlottesville and Abermarle communities. These various programs represent categories of volunteering opportunities with similar sites and shared experiences. The Madison House serves as the student volunteer center at UVa. Through the program, students are required to volunteer one to three hours weekly. Weekly opportunities allow students to have sustainable relationships with the community members they serve. Shifts are available on weekends to accommodate students’ schedules. The Madison House provides 120 different volunteer opportunities at 90 schools, nursing homes, day care
centers, hospitals, and non-profit agencies in Charlottesville and the surrounding area. The main office for the Madison House is a friendly, inviting shared space that entices students to enter, hang out during free time, and learn more about ways to get involved. The center is conveniently located in the middle of campus and is easily accessible from the Rotunda building and major paths students take on campus (see appendix). At UVa, student volunteers are rewarded and the expectation of service is strong, beginning during the freshman year.

Student-led initiatives are at the heart of the stories being told by UVa about the importance of lifelong civic participation and engagement. The UVa Student Council created a committee in 2009 devoted to the work of civic engagement on campus and in the surrounding community. In an effort to expose opportunities and create a space for stimulating conversations, the Student Council sought to assemble a diverse group who desired to be proactive about opportunities for civic engagement at the university. These efforts, and similar other student organizations, are a result of the university’s prompting of students to tap into their full potential civically. These messages are coherent with the history and traditions of the University and have what Fisher calls fidelity because they reinforce the values that represented the university ever since its founding.

The connection to the Greek agora, a place for citizens to come together and discuss matters important to all, is embodied by organizations such as the Student Council and its efforts to create a space where students are invited and welcome to openly deliberate about important matters in the public sphere. The National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement is part of UVa’s continued efforts to improve civic
knowledge on campus and in the community. The center is one of twenty universities and colleges with academic programs and concentrations in political affairs. Its priorities, directed toward college students, are to establish: relationship with electoral politics, foundation in civic education, and focus on career development. The Center addresses these priorities through activities and programs such as the student Voter Registration Coalition, the internship program, an annual career panel, and the Youth Leadership Initiative. This initiative directly responds to a call to action first put into place by Jefferson and now sustained by current campus leaders to improve today’s society.

One of the most impressive movements for civic engagement on campus is found at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. The Center established The Academy for Civic Renewal, which works in consultation with a group or community to develop a civic-leadership program that meets various needs. Programs are designed to build communities and strengthen democratic practices, promote public dialogue and deliberation, and increase the capacity of citizens to effect positive change. The Academy is a functioning unit of the Cooper Center, and Nancy Gansneder is currently the inaugural director of the Academy for Civic Renewal. In this capacity, she designs and implements civic leadership programs to promote civic engagement in Virginia communities. Here, the coherence of UVa’s story is demonstrated through the seamless urgency of promoting civic engagement in step with the interests of the university as a whole.

Another example of an extension service is the University of Virginia Center for Politics, founded in 1998 by Larry Sabato, current Director of the Center. He believed
“politics are a good thing!” Because of this, the Center for Politics was created as a nonpartisan organization based in Charlottesville. The Center aims to increase civic knowledge and involvement among all citizens. The Center is funded by both private and public sources. The programming for the Center for Politics mainly focuses on civic education and engagement. The Youth Leadership Initiative, a signature program of the Center, provides a firm foundation of civics materials for K-12 schools across the country and throughout the world to use. The Center for Politics also organizes conferences and programs, publishes reports and books and promotes college student interest in civic education by providing internship opportunities.

The prestige and high rankings of the University only add to its seemingly untouchable disposition as an institution that offers superb civic engagement opportunities. The 2011 edition of *U.S. News & World Report* ranks the University of Virginia as the 2nd best public university (tied with UCLA) in the United States and the overall 25th best university in the nation. This ranking reinforces the stories UVa is telling its students about the importance of values.

The extensive history at the university also presents a contradictory image. When I visited the university in February 2011, I was struck by the confidence of some campus leaders. There was a sense of elitism about other similar practices in place at peer schools. Interviews sometimes included boasts about their school’s history and influence on American higher education. Since UVa has established itself as such a forerunner in American higher education, it seemed to be understood that I would reference UVa as an exemplary institution that other schools should be mimicking. Though in many
programs this is actually the case, the consistency of this attitude showed me the mindset of those in the UVa community.

The University of Virginia is certainly a model institution for civic engagement practices in the United States today. There, programs enrich students’ experiences and model values important to the long-standing history of the institution. Challenged by founder Thomas Jefferson, UVa is proudly living its call to action by training active citizens during college. These students are interacting with civic engagement opportunities that will forever mold their viewpoints, political interests, and moral compass. The task of training effective citizens is made possible through the promotion of values, through storytelling, while inspiring students to buy into their individual roles. Though flaws are evident and inevitable, much good is being done through UVa’s efforts to change the communities around the institution.
CHAPTER TWO: ELON UNIVERSITY

Elon University is located in Elon, North Carolina. As a nationally-recognized university for civic engagement initiatives, I have been most intrigued by the stories Elon University is telling its students about the importance of becoming productive citizens beyond their time in college. The school is world-renowned for engaged and experiential learning, and is consistently recognized on the Presidential Honor Roll, sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, for civic engagement innovations and achievement.

Elon defines civic engagement as, “The process of learning about the assets, needs, and concerns of the larger communities of which we are a part and the willingness to collaborate with others to help define and achieve the common good” (Elon University website). Elon’s definition of civic engagement emphasizes effective, engaged citizens post-graduation from the University.

At the core of Elon University’s mission is the preparation of civically engaged graduates who have a global perspective on how they can become productive citizens. Graduates are encouraged by being motivated to help the common good. As a university, the Elon website emphasizes its responsibility to live in a community, acknowledging our interdependency with others. The stories at the core of Elon’s mission as a university align with Elon’s institutional focus and this allows students to see the importance of related service and outreach endeavors supported by their university.
The Office of Civic Engagement at Elon was established to “help students develop the knowledge, understanding, values and skills necessary to sustain a commitment to community well-being and civic action throughout their lives” (CE website). To this end, Elon students, faculty, staff and alumni are engaged in an “intentional and progressive educational process” by creating an environment that:

- Recognizes its responsibility, as a member of the larger community, to actively address social conditions through mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationships with community partners.

- Offers opportunities and programs that deepen students’ awareness and understanding of social and political issues and challenges students to develop a framework for responsible citizenship.

- Provides increasingly complex learning experiences that enhance the development of the skills needed to be effective citizens, including communication, collaboration, critical analysis, problem solving and leadership.

- Celebrates and rewards the accomplishments of students, faculty, staff, alumni and community partners who demonstrate good citizenship, live lives of civic engagement and support the civic life and programs of the university.

Elon’s commitment to the community, as stated on the Office of Civic Engagement website, directly promotes the value of being committed to others. The inclusion of community partnerships affirms the university’s belief that community relationships are necessary for growth and sustainability of networks. The office also seeks to teach the whole person about citizenship, and this shows students the importance of their personal investment in the greater world. By Elon teaching the whole person, students receive a strong foundation to become effective citizens for a lifetime. This reflects the importance and value of the intersection of classroom teaching and real-life situations and opportunity for application. These learning experiences increase the value of classroom-
to-life understanding and action. Finally, the recognition of good works and outstanding
citizenship motivates humans to do good works, whether students or faculty. This
incentive encourages more positive contributions to be made on campus and in the
community. Overall, the Office of Civic Engagement directly promotes the values of
commitment to others and scholarship in action by guiding their students to realize their
potential and equipping them with the knowledge necessary to make a positive
contribution after graduating from Elon.

The campus is small and quaint, yet the charm and spirit of the school is
overwhelming. Elon has received numerous honors and awards recognizing it as a model
school for civic engagement. These honors reward the values-based approach used at
Elon. By promoting the values of commitment to others and the connection of classroom
and civic action, Elon is teaching students why they should care about others and how
they are expected to be responsible citizens after they graduate. With such an impressive
array of awards given at the local, state, and national level commending community
service during the undergraduate college years, Elon is modeling the way for other
schools which may want to tell similar stories and promote the same values.

At Elon, the Kernodle Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement
trains students, faculty, staff, and community partners for service opportunities that
benefit the university and the surrounding community. The Kernodle Center houses Elon
Volunteers!, a student-run program providing an array of volunteer activities, coordinates
Elon’s academic service-learning programs and courses, and sponsors alternative break
service trips. This physical space allows students to see the institution’s emphasis and
commitment to resources by providing an area where students, faculty, and staff can
come together and enjoy service and engagement. This commitment is reflected in the location of the building (see appendix), the staff and available resources, and ultimately, the positive contribution students’ efforts are making in the community. Similar to the institution at UVa, the Kernodle Center and the Weldon Cooper Center for Service at Virginia are promoting similar ideals and values through their programming and activity options for students. These centers are encouraging the common values of commitment to others and the importance of classroom application of citizenship traits. Both schools promote the same model of engaged citizenship, such as program structure and guiding curriculums, and both successfully prompt students to buy into the school’s model.

In 2009, the Kernodle Center for Service Learning changed its name to the Kernodle Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement. This name change reflects the Center’s commitment to community engagement and the importance of inclusion and recognition for students seeking related service opportunities. In 2007, Elon was named one of the top three universities nationwide in the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This distinction is awarded annually to American colleges and universities who achieve excellence in civic engagement models and practices. The school’s success has continued with additional awards and national recognition. During the 2008-2009 school year, Elon was named one of five recipients of The Washington Center’s inaugural Higher Education Civic Engagement Award. This award seeks to recognize the very top schools in the country for civic engagement achievement. This impressive honor is due, in part, to the rich resources Elon has access to on campus and nearby in the state. For example, the North Carolina Campus Compact is housed on campus and is an outstanding resource for spotlighting engaged students and
the good work they are completing. Surprisingly, however, the Campus Compact office is located inconveniently away from the main area of campus. Elon provides a year-to-year contract with the Campus Compact office allowing the office to remain on campus.

At Elon, service learning is believed to be “a fundamentally academic endeavor in which service is an integrated component of a course” (Elon SL website). Students are eligible to earn credit while using an experiential education approach that includes an established community partnership guided by the expertise of professors and community-based practitioners, working together to address community concerns. Most partnerships between Elon and the community engage students in service primarily with nonprofit organizations, schools and government agencies.

Elon consistently affirms an emphasis on engaged pedagogies as a foundation of the curriculum created and taught in the classroom. The importance of developing global citizens and informed leaders is found in the Academic Service-Learning courses details and descriptions offered to students. In its statement of purpose, these service-learning courses seek to train students in a variety of personal, cognitive, and social outcomes. These outcomes include self-awareness, improved critical thinking, and an increased understanding of social responsibility, diversity and structures of society (Elon SL website).

Community partnerships are integral in the existence and success of the Kernodle Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement. Each year, the Center partners with more than eighty local community agencies for events. Partners include nonprofit agencies, schools, and government agencies. An extensive network of support is available
to students to strengthen and sustain the learning process underway when engaging in these efforts.

Service is a core value of Elon University. During the 2009-2010 school year, Elon students contributed 97,977 hours of service through individual and group projects. Eighty percent of the class of 2010 participated in service during their undergraduate experiences. Service opportunities are available through sports teams, fraternities and sororities, and other student organizations on campus. Service is part of the story all over campus, and this consistency demonstrates the university’s commitment to developing strong citizens for a better world.

Pre-Serve is one of Elon’s signature Freshman Summer Experience (FSE) programs. These programs are designed to provide incoming freshmen the opportunity to meet other first-year Elon students while participating in service work. Students participating in Pre-Serve have the chance to become familiar with the surrounding Burlington community before arriving on campus in the fall through completing a variety of service opportunities. In former years, Pre-Servers have worked with Habitat for Humanity, assisted with riding lessons at Kopper Top Life Learning Center, worked with kids at the Boys and Girls Club, and served meals to members of the community at Allied Churches.

The Service-Learning Community (SLC) is the oldest living learning community on campus. It is a residential option for students wanting to complete community service while in college. SLC students live together on the same floor in Staley Hall and
participate in service projects, communities activities, and reflection sessions together throughout the school year (SLC website).

The Elon website welcome page highlights the school’s commitment to student-centered values. The five “distinctively Elon experiences” include undergraduate research, study abroad, service learning, leadership, and internships (Elon website). These values of commitment to others and engagement during and after college are woven into the stories Elon tells its students to teach them about the importance of becoming an active and engaged citizen. The stories Elon tells through its activities, initiatives, programs, and curriculum are coherent because they are all centered on the same basic idea of helping others and using their education and skills to seek opportunities for engagement. Before students start at Elon, and especially after their time there, these stories ring true to them through their dedication to action, what Fisher calls fidelity, as students “buy” into the attractions of Elon and the idea that they are doing important and necessary work. The students learn to appreciate these values through the constant reminder of what their role as a citizen is and in turn they appreciate the efforts for civic promotion through their student activities. Elon’s stories are based on values that remind their students that their goal is to link service with meaningful academic experiences.

Elon’s website stresses the importance Elon places on faculty support, with a special emphasis on numerous service opportunities. Part of the story Elon tells its students include the importance of engaged faculty working alongside students to maximize the educational experiences. Many faculty have engaged in international
learning, mentorships, and extensive scholastic research while actively enhancing the education experiences of their students. This allows students to be excited and energized about what they are learning and how they are learning. Faculty support is a crucial component to the successful reinforcement of values within the Elon community, so the story has fidelity because everyone at Elon, from the administration to the students, from staff to faculty, is a protagonist: the engaged citizen.

The benefits of this partnership are described on the Kernodle Center’s website, and they are numerous. Elon students, faculty, and staff can assist local organizations by growing and adding variety to the volunteer base, educating college students about community needs and social issues, promoting the organization to new audiences, providing access to university resources and professional development opportunities, and creating positive relationships with members of the Elon community (Kernodle Center website).

I recently had the opportunity to visit campus for the 2011 Campus Compact PACE conference. This visit allowed me to observe the campus culture and institutional initiatives at Elon while learning more about civic engagement issues and programs in North Carolina. Visiting campus allowed me to see the promotion of values in action. Elon’s prestigious national awards recognize the institution as a model for civic engagement excellence. The story Elon tells is coherent because of this continuous and seamless focus on what all the members of the community have done and are committed to do. Elon’s commitment to prepare contributing citizens makes sense to the students who have enrolled in a university with an established reputation for civic engagement.
At Elon, students hear, believe, and live through their own stories of commitment to others while promoting engaged citizenship. These stories are compelling students to embrace their role in the world to do their part.

Flaws and roadblocks are inevitable in any similar model of civic engagement. For example, despite the best motivations of schools, some programs are hard to implement logistically. Despite Elon’s best intentions, the University’s motivation for recognition can be called into question. For example, new and innovative programs could likely be created to satisfy a need or strengthen an application packet for an award. Though Elon is a distinguished university that produces effective, contributing citizens, students must fulfill certain requirements to graduate, and will thus do what is necessary to meet Elon’s standards. In this case, civic engagement is mandated and not actually chosen by the student. Even if the student does not intend to be a contributing member of society, he or she must act like that is important to them to receive credits to graduate. This contradiction may be expressed outwardly or privately, but not all students will be inclined to “buy” wholeheartedly into the life changing experiences of embracing civic engagement. Elon has an impressive record for student participation, and this is likely a reflection of goodhearted intentions to contribute to society. Although the good intentions seem to drive most of the programming at Elon, slightly ulterior motives are likely present. This notion is established through the certainty that the university is self-serving enough to protect its own image and promote its best features to please alumni, satisfy current students, and attract future students. Though flaws are present in any model, Elon’s approach to training effective citizens is transformational and rewarding to both the student and the institution.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Elon University and the University of Virginia are telling stories about the value of civic engagement to their students. As model schools for civic engagement practices, the rhetoric used at both schools provides valuable insight into how these messages work and influence the idea of citizenship for students. The use of Fisher’s narrative paradigm provides a rich lens for analyzing the stories these universities are telling. Universities must train students to become contributing citizens, and these universities are using their unique school history to play a crucial role in shaping their message to students. The University of Virginia and Elon University communities are embracing the call to prepare engaged students, and this analysis investigates how these schools are advancing their mission to foster productive citizens.

The rhetorical strategies used by UVa and Elon certainly reinforce images of institutional values and transcendence, important components of Fisher’s narrative paradigm. These messages seem to make sense and ring true among students, but the concept is so big and so altruistic that it is hard for students not to agree. Many students may naturally find themselves listening to the institutional story because it is what they feel they should do or are strongly encouraged to do. With a good-hearted value such as commitment to others, many students may find themselves in civic engagement opportunities without actually choosing to be committed to others. The lines of definition, calling, and action are blurred, and therefore it is hard to distinguish when the story is actually resonating with students. The fidelity of a story, including how relevant it is, how consistent it is with the values it represents, and how transcendent those values are, should reflect what a student already believes and does to be a better citizen and
contribute to the larger world. Both UVa and Elon stress those transcendent values of selflessness and engagement and remind their students constantly why and how they should live their life as a citizen, starting on campus and continuing in their community.

In higher education, it is certainly possible to live in an “academic bubble.” Students are safely protected from some real-world problems due to the nature of living on campus, having social networks mostly only on campus, and having limited access to the community beyond the boundaries of campus. Within the years of undergraduate study, universities may emphasize many different values to students, from the idea of knowledge for knowledge’s sake to the commitment to participate in hands-on activities to gain experience. At the University of Virginia and Elon University, students are encouraged to absorb the importance of being committed to others or the necessity of linking learned knowledge with civic participation beyond the classroom.

For the purposes of this study, it is impossible to separate where students are actually learning and accepting the call to action for these values. Some students may come to college with these expectations for themselves and their campus communities, while others are only introduced to certain values when they become students in college. No matter how these students may identify with these values and how they learn about their importance, the stories UVa and Elon tell are based on them and reinforce them in a way that makes it challenging for students not to recognize them while on campus, in the classroom, and during after-school activities. Students are constantly exposed and shaped by these stories, and thus they are likely to retain at least some of the basic ideas behind values as transcendent as caring for others, helping those in need, and generally being
‘good’ citizens. Students are then forced to reflect on how they can prepare to be thoughtful, productive citizens beyond the bubble of college.

The stories based on the values of being committed to others and putting scholarship into action, according to my research and findings, ring true among students at both institutions. This is demonstrated by the statistics of students involved in campus programming and their identification of a need to serve. Just based on the assumption that students do elect to go to the University of Virginia or Elon University, both universities successfully project a coherent story to prospective students. This is evident internally within institutions that promote being a values-based institution, yet students do actually have to earn degrees and meet requirements set forth for graduation from the institution. Because of this, students must be compliant to a certain extent and act as if they agree with the values-based stories they are told. There is no way to know exactly whether these values will resonate later in a student’s life, but by practicing these actions while in college, students are properly trained and guided to become productive citizens committed to the well-being of others and the advancement of civic training taught in the classroom. Fisher’s narrative paradigm tells us that stories are persuasive if students are taking what they learn and applying the concepts beyond college graduation. It is more practical to expect students to be committed immediately after graduating from college rather than years after they leave an institution. Following this assumption, values do resonate and ring true with the students at UVa and Elon that choose to extend their civic education beyond their undergraduate years.

Though it is hard to distinguish exactly how students absorb the teaching of institutional values during the college selection process, the undergraduate journey, and
beyond, the way in which the institution teaches these values is most important. Though the process will touch each student differently, an institution’s surest influence is during the recruiting period and the undergraduate years. As universities seek to find the best way to teach their values, they create opportunities for their students to learn about responsibility through a call to action. By offering a variety of academic and extra-curricular programming, schools position themselves to promote their own values and create a connection among those values, their students and their own commitment to both. Students are more likely to form their own allegiance to the school, including school pride, alumni donations, and other investments in the university for the future after learning and experiencing the values of the institution firsthand. As universities like UVa and Elon improve their academic quality, offer meaningful experiences, and encourage individual growth, they demonstrate a commitment to the values they use to attract students in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, Charland’s constitutive rhetoric (1987) is helpful to understand this cycle, as universities create themselves rhetorically as places for civic engagement; they interpellate students who are already committed to an engaged model of citizenship and therefore respond to the universities’ call to action; once on campus, this engaged mode of citizenship is rhetorically maintained and reinforced in classes, activities, institutions and program that tell a coherent story. The end result is the embodiment of the values that were used to appeal to civically minded students. Moreover, the stories are rhetorically appealing to those who may not be interpellated at first, but become persuaded by the transcendent values of helping others and taking their
knowledge beyond the classroom and the university. This call to others is self-created and thus matches the vision of what people are called to do.

Both schools invent themselves in unique ways. For example, UVa is a historical state school that was founded hundreds of years ago by one of the greatest American presidents of all time. Its prominence is firmly rooted in the work of former United States leaders and officials. On the contrast, Elon has cultivated itself to be one of the most premier colleges in the college through a remarkable turnaround nearly forty years ago (Keller, 2004). In former Elon President George Keller’s book, *Transforming a College: The Story of a Little-known College’s Strategic Climb to National Distinction*, he describes the amazing strides Elon has made to become a quality American institution of higher education. The differences in the ways these two institutions rhetorically construct and maintain their images as civically minded universities show the importance of comparing two nationally recognized colleges, each with very different backgrounds and paths to success.

More and more national universities are creating civic engagement programs and initiatives. This trend is seen at UVa, Elon University, and my current institution, Wake Forest University. At Wake Forest, students are encouraged to embrace the motto, “Pro Humanitate,” meaning “for humanity,” during their undergraduate experiences and involvement. Wake Forest University consistently remains a top-ranked university in the country, and Wake Forest’s view that education is not without a sense of community responsibility is crucial in understanding the role of civic engagement. To date, “the single most valuable contribution of service learning is the deeper learning that results from practical experience, observation, and the application, in the world beyond campus,
of knowledge and theories gleaned from the classroom” (Fyten, 2009, p.). “The fundamental question we face is how we serve our students in finding meaning in their lives and giving value to their communities,” says Michele K. Gillespie, former Associate Provost for Academic Initiatives. “Political will is strongest, however, when it grows out of what people believe is essential for their well-being,” report Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan (2007, p. 12). The need for deliberation opens doors into politics for people to talk and become more involved. The Kettering Foundation uses the term “organic democracy” to describe how a democracy engages its citizens, generates political will, informs judgment, and amasses powers needed for effective action (Harriger and McMillan, 2007, p. 13). Organic democracy cannot be measured by institutional standards. Instead, networks are more important than scale, power is relational (not legal), and a shared sense of direction trumps a majority vote (Harriger and McMillan, 2007, p. 13). Speaking of a service learning opportunity offered to students at Wake Forest, Kettering Foundation President, David Mathews said, “At Wake Forest, it should be worth noting that while the fellows became more critical of the political system (perhaps because they were more aware of what it could be), they were more likely to commend the institution for preparing them for citizenship-- and more likely to feel their voices were heard on campus (perhaps because they learned how to create a public voice) (Harriger and McMillan, 2007. p.13).” Harriger and McMillan conclude,

The implication for all of higher education is obvious. Every institution influences the ways its students understand the political system and their role in it, whether or not the institution intends to. The question is, are colleges and
universities content with what their students learn from politics as it is usually practiced on campus? (Harriger and McMillan, 2007, p. 13)

At the University of Alabama, my undergraduate institution, the school is growing in both numbers and quality by promoting principles of citizenship during recruitment of high school students. These students are taught the importance of giving back during the application and recruitment process, and students are offered a solid foundation of classes and experiences beginning in the freshman year to learn more about ways to become involved while in college. Specifically, programs like afterschool mentoring for at-risk students in the Tuscaloosa area are growing rapidly. College students are linked with elementary school students in the community to mentor them and encourage them to succeed. The University of Alabama is committed to producing effective citizens through the advancement of community-based initiatives that build the community as a whole and serve others while doing so.

Students are also taught the importance of civic engagement during the high school years. This trend can be attributed to service components required to graduate and an increased awareness of the value of training productive citizens at an earlier age. This sense of importance drives students’ decisions concerning which college or university to attend, and thus universities compete to outdo rival institutions. Marketed the correct way, institutions are selling their service brand to prospective students and their families. Depending on which school pitches the sale the best way, a decision is made, thus making the service angle profitable to the school. At UVa and Elon, student interactions with civic engagement are highlighted aggressively through the admissions centers of both schools. Both on the website and in admissions literature, the importance of giving
of one’s time and talents is highlighted. With the increased importance placed on service, it seems impossible for institutions not to include this information in their respective recruitment strategies. Universities like UVa and Elon convey their values effectively to online visitors and prospective students. The emergence of what they identify as important values and the role these values play in a student’s formation during the undergraduate years are crucial. Without this focus on what is emerging as the trend of civic engagement (Jacoby, 2009), schools potentially lose valuable opportunity to promote a values-based education that extends beyond the educational experience.

It is also important to consider the motivations of institutions of higher education while promoting civic engagement. All schools face the challenge of recruiting the brightest students, fundraising for campus improvements and scholarship opportunities for current and future students, and competing for coveted awards that bring prestige to the institutions they serve. These motivations drive the universities’ many civic engagement efforts, whether to attract and impress future students and their families or by creating and sustaining programs for recognition and other benefits. Perhaps most universities, including UVa and Elon, are less concerned with the effects of civic engagement opportunities and their importance in the lives of students, but rather focus on the shorter-term goals and objectives of the institution. During this study, I found that institutional programming uniquely matched the application language of awards the school seeks to apply for each year. When I realized this, I began to wonder if universities are creating programs and opportunities that meet a need not only for students, but also for award applications as well. In this case, the school’s motives are questionable.
An interesting example of irony emerges from the promotion of selflessness by institutions promoting civic engagement. In their very efforts to promote selflessness and a commitment to others, institutions are selfishly pursuing more money, more prestige, and more awards to benefit the institution. This ironic dimension traps institutions seeking to be viewed as unselfish. Institutions constantly strive to sell positive results as reality. Because of this, universities neglect to highlight a clear barrier to their total and supposedly selfless commitment to the consumers, as prospective students, their parents, and the community as a whole.

During this study, I found that the coherence of the stories UVa and Elon tell is easier to identify than the fidelity of their narratives. According to Fisher, we should rely on what he calls the consequences and transcendence of the actual stories. In the case of the two universities I analyzed, I tried to explore the significance and potential future impact of students listening to these institutional stories and internalizing the values they represent. Successful transcendence occurs when a student has identified the need to seek a certain value and holds that value as a guide for daily living. The consequences also persuade a student to take action and pursue the benefits of what is offered by institutions. As found in this study, both UVa and Elon University tell stories based on transcendent values through the compelling promotion of commitment to others and active citizenship during the students’ time on campus and after they graduate.

The narratives I analyzed in this study are only a glimpse into the national and international scope of civic engagement rhetoric. The values embedded in these stories lend insight into the world around us. The nature of this study lends to ever-changing and adaptive enhancements toward the advancement of civic engagement rhetoric and
citizenship building initiatives in the future. I anticipate the findings of this study will have their own fidelity as they ring true in explorations of other universities and similar stories as new opportunities to share values and create persuasive narratives. Civic engagement rhetoric is rich and expansive, and I look forward to future scholarship and findings revealing more about the stories universities tell their students to teach them the value of citizenship.
APPENDIX

Campus Map of the University of Virginia
Works Cited


http://www.terpimpact.umd.edu/content.asp?cat=12&subcat=0


PATTY ANN GREEN
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Winston-Salem, NC 27106
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EDUCATION
Wake Forest University: Winston-Salem, North Carolina
  Master of Arts in Communication Candidate; May 2011
  Thesis research: Rhetoric of civic engagement in institutions of higher education

The University of Alabama: Tuscaloosa, Alabama
  Cum Laude; Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies; Minor in Human Development/Family Studies, Civic Engagement and Leadership; University Honors Program; May 2009

  Academic Honor Societies: Mortar Board, Golden Key, Alpha Lambda Delta, Anderson Society, Order of Omega, Lambda Pi Eta (Communication Studies), Omicron Delta Kappa, Blue Key, and Cardinal Key

GRADUATE INVOLVEMENT
National Communication Association student member
NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education student member
Blackburn Institute fellow
Junior League of Winston-Salem: Provisional member
Delta Zeta Sorority New Member and Philanthropy National Committees member
Delta Zeta Triad Alumnae Chapter of North Carolina Vice President of Membership

UNDERGRADUATE INVOLVEMENT
Delta Zeta Sorority: President (2008); directed daily chapter operations, lead chapter meetings, and promoted active sisterhood; size--232
Capstone Men and Women (4 years): Official University ambassadors for the Office of the President
Mortar Board Honor Society: President (2008-2009); lead chapter meetings and served as representative on campus; size—52
Honors College Student Mentoring Program: Student Leader and Tutor (2006-2009); planned weekly lessons and assisted with classroom operations at area elementary schools
Blackburn Institute: Student Fellow (2008-2009); promote awareness of the state of Alabama’s current challenges and encourage civic awareness to become positive change agents
Student Government Association: Communications Director (2008-2009); coordinated projects through effective communication to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and general public
Council for Community-Based Partnerships: Student Member (2006-2009); linked campus with service project opportunities in community
UNDERGRADUATE DISTINCTIONS

Panhellenic Greek Woman of the Year (2009)
Capstone Hero Award (2009)
Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges (2009)
The University of Alabama Homecoming Court (2008)
Membership in XXXI Senior Female Honorary
Membership in Anderson Society (24 seniors on campus)
Order of Omega Outstanding Junior Award (2008)
Order of Omega Outstanding Sophomore Award (2007)
Delta Zeta Sorority Region XV Outstanding Sophomore Award (2007)
Order of Omega Outstanding Freshman Award (2006)
Received Tutwiler and Delta Zeta Scholarships (2005-2008)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Wake Forest University: Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Teaching assistant: Spring 2011- COM 339 Practices of Citizenship
Campus Life graduate assistant: Co-advisor of Interfraternity Council (IFC), Advisor of
Order of Omega, Advisor of All-Greek Council (January 2010- Present)
The University of Alabama: Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Graduate assistant: Housing and Residential Communities Office (August 2009-
December 2009)
Housing and Residential Communities office student worker (June 2009-July 2009)

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Green Row Communications, LLC student intern in London, United Kingdom
(July 2010- August 2010)
Tuscaloosa Family Resource Center in Tuscaloosa, AL (July 2008)
Office of Congressman A.G. Davis (AL) in Washington, D.C. (June/July
2008)
Freshman Forum student intern (August- December 2007)

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Honors College Mentoring Program (January 2006- December 2009)
The University of Alabama Speech and Hearing Center volunteer (2005-2009)
Calvary Baptist Church College Ministry: Mission trip to Boston, MA- May 2008
University of Alabama RISE Center (2008-2009)
American Red Cross (2005)
CONVENTION PRESENTATIONS

Panel presentation: National Communication Association Conference; San Francisco, CA: November 2010
Presenter: Jon C. Dalton Institute on College Student Values; Tallahassee, FL: February 2010