

RALLY CRIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
THEIR IMPACT UPON SELECT UNIVERSITIES AND WHETHER THEY ARE
EFFECTIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THEIR BRANDS

By

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This dissertation, and my years-long pursuit of this doctoral degree, as well as my master's degree, is dedicated to my wife, Elise, and my daughters, Emily, Sarah and Rachel. My work as a vice president at Middle Tennessee State University is time consuming and demanding, yet my family permitted and encouraged me to use great swaths of time to earn these credentials. I could never repay them for their love and support throughout this journey.

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When I got my bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky in 1985, I was so very grateful that I said aloud to the heavens that I'd never seek another academic credential. Leave it to Dr. Mike Boyle, a true salesman, to convince me to go against my declaration, convincing me to not only earn my master's degree in his University College, but to enroll in this doctoral program he helped design in the College of Education. Don't leave money on the table, he said – and he said it so often that I turned it into a campus marketing campaign to convince others to do the same.

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I urge my colleagues to become students – and strongly recommend you consider this program. I have gained valuable perspective and insight being a degree-seeking student (and teaching a class, which I have done as an adjunct in the Scott Borchetta College of Media and Entertainment for the last 14 years), which I believe has made me a more effective and empathic administrator. Finally, to the older adults who think you are too old to go back to school, think again. You can do this – and you will enjoy it. It will never be the perfect time. Just do it now.

ABSTRACT

While slogans, taglines, sayings, credos, catchphrases, motto statements, axioms are common in higher education, some institutions have rally cries, a phrase that has found enduring resonance, transcends marketing and advertising, and has become a shared expression of identity and community. This study examines rally cries at select higher-education institutions, exploring what impact they have upon the universities they represent. It also explores whether they are effective expressions of their brands; how, or whether, such cries build community; and whether they have expanded beyond athletics and into other facets of the institution, including, but not limited to, academics, administration, alumni and advancement.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Tradition is the living Faith of the dead.” – Jorostav Pelikan

There are many names to elements found commonly in higher education marketing, including, but not limited to, slogans, taglines, sayings, credos, slogan, catchphrases, motto statements, axioms (McKnight & Paugh, 1999). Universities across the United States, and, indeed, around the world, use them as tactics to delineate and differentiate themselves from other higher education institutions (Rubican, 2019).

The term rally cry, however, has been defined as a “shouted word, phrase, or sound used by a body of fighters before and in battle” and “something (such as a catchphrase, incident or event) that is used to excite people to support a cause or to rouse people to action.” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2024). These types of slogans, through repetition, diversity of application or verbal or written evocation of emotion, allow community members to identify and present as members of a shared experience or affiliation (George, 2022). These “slogans go beyond brand positioning; they also facilitate brand recognition since they stick in peoples’ minds. Effective slogans speak to consumers, investors, employees, and other key stakeholders, creating a feeling of familiarity and comfort around a brand.” (George, 2022). The most effective of these are often “simple, pithy statements” that go beyond a tagline or a slogan, conveying a “deep meaning for the organization that transcends marketing and sales” (Miller, 2021).

Many but not all, of the rally cries in higher education have some ties to athletics, date back for decades, the most successful of which “has its own iconic history, passed down through generations of alumni” (Duffley, 2022). The most effective of these have become “substitutes for greetings, goodbyes and much more” (Voss, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Pressures continue to mount upon higher education institutions from a variety of fronts, including, but not limited to, the decline in the U.S. birth rate, which “has been declining for the better part of two decades” (Decker, 2025). That has produced the so-called “enrollment cliff,” which, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, is upon us: It projects the total number of U.S. high school graduates, traditionally the highest volume consumer for undergraduate education, “will peak in 2025 before entering a period of steady decline through 2041 attributable to fewer births 18 years prior” and will result in a 13% decline from its peak (WICHE, 2025). Further, for public institutions, state appropriations for higher education nationwide have been “uneven and unpredictable” since the Great Recession of 2008, with 17 states reporting declines in inflation-adjusted funding as recently as Fiscal Year 2024 and prompting many institutions to cover shortfalls by raising tuition and fees, which passes costs along to students and families (NEA, 2025). The combination of these and other pressures has created a heightened atmosphere of competition among higher education entities, as admissions and marketing teams must work to sustain enrollment from a smaller pool of prospects and with products that are often increasingly more expensive every year.

Bauld (2025) notes that rising competition and a shrinking prospect base has promoted concerted efforts among higher education institutions to set themselves apart, adding that “colleges borrowed from the playbooks of private corporations and sought to establish brand identities.” Many institutions do this by projecting a sense of community, not only for prospective students but the communities of academics, alumni and others that surround and support their students. Rally cries, a form of such boosterism, are often one of the tools used by

colleges and universities to build such connections and distinctiveness, the most effective of which can be leveraged not only in athletics, but also academics, admissions and fundraising.

Purpose of Study

. This study was to gain insight and understanding about the different applications and usage of rally cries across several higher education institutions. My intent was to identify aspects that make rally cries successful and whether institutions with such slogans perceive them as a valuable aspect of their identities. What is a rally cry and what impact do rally cries have upon select universities and are they effective expressions of their brand? Also: How do such cries build community? And how common is it for them to expand beyond athletics and into other facets of the institution, including, but not limited to, academics, admissions, alumni outreach, and fundraising?

Significance of Study

This study attempted to identify rally cries that have achieved greater permanence and recognition and provide context on how those words are being used and how effective they are in building community, as building and engaging audiences are vital priorities in higher education – particularly in admissions, athletics and development efforts. In doing so, this study attempted to find common threads between those slogans that have achieved greater acceptance and permanence and how they have been leveraged by their institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: Does the institution have a rally cry that is readily known?
 - RQ1a: Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)?

- RQ1b: Externally (In the community)?
- RQ2: If yes, does the institution's rally cry have an origin story (how it came into existence)?
- RQ3: To what extent are these rally cries embraced in other areas of the university beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?
 - RQ3a: Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)?
 - RQ3b: Externally (In the community)?
- RQ4: In what ways, if any, is the rally cry used to build community?

Context

The study interviewed seven marketing executives and/or administrators at select institutions on The Princeton Review 2025 list of the nation's 390 top colleges and universities who responded to a request to join an interview set. Through interviews, the study explored whether the participants recognized and could identify whether their institutions have a rally cry and whether it has achieved recognition from its respective communities.

Role of Researcher

As vice president for marketing and communications at Middle Tennessee State University, I am the chief storyteller of our institution, using a wide variety of platforms and methods to reach a broadband of relevant and valuable audience with our messages. Further, I recommended "I am True Blue" to the President's Task Force for Non-Violent Conflict Resolution in 2011 to name and promote a set of values developed by the group in the wake of the murder of a MTSU student-athlete by her roommate, also a student, at their off-campus apartment following an argument. "I am True Blue" evolved into a hybrid rally cry and motto for

MTSU and is still in place today. As such, I am familiar with the creation and use of rally cries and have witnessed how such sayings can grow into more permanent applications of a university.

Contextual Framework

The foundation of the study is a set of seven interviews of executives at institutions on The Princeton Review 2025 list of the nation's 390 top colleges and universities. Through interviews, the study explored whether participants from these institutions recognized and identified whether they have a rally cry and whether the institutions have achieved recognition from their respective communities. The literature review augments the survey results with contextual research on various themes, practices and theories that support or relate to concepts raised by survey respondents.

Definitions and Abbreviations

For the purposes of this research, the term “**rally cry**” was used to refer to such devices that have become ingrained into an institution's shared culture and identity. Sometimes known as chants, battle cries or war cries, they can be considered slogans that “cause people to feel something – hope, belonging, school pride, or whatever emotional quality you want associated with your brand” (Jimerson, 2016). Rally cries are in the same genre as other marketing elements, such as:

- **Mottos**, often used interchangeably with rally cries, typically are enduring as they are usually embedded in the trappings affiliated with the institution's academic mission, seal, or institutional history (Rubincan & Kingsfield, 2019).

- **Slogans**, often used interchangeably with rally cries, are “casual, memorable, repeatable in conversation, and sometimes they even get turned into musical jingles” (Jimerson, 2016).
- **Taglines**, which, as the name implies, are typically found “after or below a logo or, say, at the bottom of a marketing brochure” and “are designed to be read,” not said (Jimerson, 2016).

Summary

The reflective study attempted to quantify whether rally cries have achieved staying power within the communities of the institutions of the study participants and how such combinations of words affirm and establish a sense of belonging by those who utter or use them to affiliate with a college or university. The survey of the seven executives from Princeton Review institutions provided a rich cross-section of ideas, thoughts and perspectives, from which to draw upon and analyze for patterns.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lack of scholarly research on rally cries

A search of the literature at the time of this writing produced few scholarly reports on the role, specifically, of rally cries, as known as chants or war cries. Most references to rally cries are contained in articles generated by the media, particularly websites devoted to sports.

Deeper Dive on Notable Rally Cries

Rally cries often have unique origin stories and become audible sayings, chants or are affixed to awards or other manifestations of institutional purpose, athletic ambition or individual excellence by students, faculty, staff, and alumni (Yasir, 2023). Many often have a direct or indirect connection to athletics. And some simply emerge or evolve from stories, legends, accidents, or misunderstandings.

“Bear Down” at the University of Arizona

As illustrated by Duffey, the origin stories that led to the creation of many rally cries are sometimes as diverse as the cries themselves. One rally cry that came into being by accident is “Bear Down,” an expression of the University of Arizona that dates to 1926 and the death of campus student leader John Byrd “Button” Salmon after an auto accident (Hansen, 2016). Salmon was student body president; a varsity quarterback; and baseball catcher; and established campus leader, who was a “generally acclaimed popular campus figure and was “embodied all-around” (Arizona Alumni, n.d.):

“In early October (1926) after the Wildcat varsity defeated the freshman squad in an annual match at the time, Salmon and several friends were returning from a visit to

Phoenix, and an automobile crash north of Tucson near Florence left the young athlete critically injured. Salmon, then 22, lost his battle and died the morning of Oct. 18. A memorial service was held on campus that week, drawing a reported thousand mourners, and a line of cars stretched miles to his burial plot. The coach at the time, J.F. 'Pop' McKale, had visited Salmon in the hospital regularly before his death, and later told the squad the young athlete's last message to his teammates was, 'Tell them... tell the team to bear down'' (Arizona alumni, n.d.).

The Arizona student body quickly embraced the slogan, according to the university website, and applied it to platforms other than just athletics events, such as painting the slogan on the roof of the University gymnasium shortly thereafter, which eventually became known since as Bear Down Gym. Figure 1 provides a photograph of what was painted on the gym's roof and an inset photograph of John Byrd "Button" Salmon.

Figure 1
John Byrd "Button" Salmon and Bear Down Gym
at the University of Arizona (KGUN)



Eventual long-time band director Jack K. Lee wrote "Bear Down, Arizona" during his application to lead the university's marching band (Arizona alumni, n.d.). His song continues to

be played at Arizona sporting events, and from the campus belltower daily. “‘Button’ Salmon died generations ago but his message still echoes across every Arizona athletic venue, in every corner and through every building on campus, and in the thoughts of tens of thousands of Wildcat supporters past, present and future” (Arizona alumni, n.d).

Prominent rally cries from two Alabama institutions

“Roll Tide,” the rally cry for the University of Alabama, and “War Eagle,” the rally cry for Auburn University, represent perhaps the most fascinating use of such expressions in a single state. They both originated from athletics, are used beyond sports and are part of the identities of both institutions and have elements of identity and interaction when used

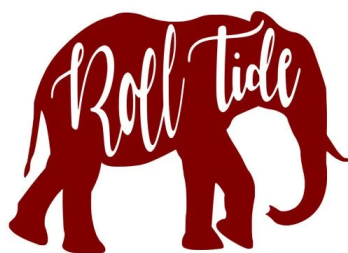
For many in the state of Alabama, the use of those rally cries goes beyond merely stating affiliation. Author and blogger Sophie Hudson wrote in 2013: “I’ve been thinking tonight about how lots of the SEC teams have a catchphrase (for lack of a better term) that their fans say to each other as a sign of loyalty or solidarity or pure-dee football crazy. In Alabama people even use the phrases as greetings – so instead of saying ‘hello’ or ‘hey,’ Auburn fans greet each other with ‘War Eagle,’ and Bama fans greet each other with ‘Roll Tide.’ The phrases also work for ‘goodbye.’ Sort of like ‘aloha,’ I reckon (Hudson, 2013).”

The precise origins of “Roll Tide,” an expression of which is seen in Figure 2, are somewhat lost in the mists of time. Wittry (2022) credits Birmingham Age-Herald sports editor Hugh "Doc" Roberts with giving Alabama its “Crimson Tide” identity slogan. Wittry (2022) says Roberts, after watching Alabama and rival Auburn play to a 6-6 tie in Birmingham in November 1907, reportedly described the game as a "crimson tide" after Auburn was expected to win but Alabama played its rival to a draw in muddy conditions. “The phrase "crimson tide" was

a fairly common descriptor back then in regards to life or blood, often in the context of war or poetry,” said Wittry (2022).

Figure 2

Representation of Roll Tide on an elephant,
a University of Alabama symbol (dictionary.com)



However, Wittry (2022) said, after a review of database of newspapers.com, a collection of digitized microfilm images of newspaper pages, said the earliest reference of the phrase "Alabama Crimson Tide" was published on November 24, 1914, in the Jackson State Tribune (Jackson, Mississippi), when the paper reported "the Mississippians swamped State Teachers College, held Alabama's Crimson Tide to a 0-0 tie...", which is shown below (Wittry, 2022). It does not appear again in the database until 1919, when Henry Harden "Zipp" Newman, sports editor of The Birmingham News, placed it in print. Newman is credited with making the nickname mainstream as he "probably popularized the name more than any other writer" (Wittry, 2022).

Sanders (2021) describes "Roll Tide" as functioning "as a celebratory exclamation, a warm greeting, an acknowledgement akin to the friendly nod of a head, and a connection to University of Alabama fans across the world. The fact that the university's official mascot is an elephant — rather than an anthropomorphic ocean wave — fazes no one (Sanders, 2021)."

Auburn has only one official nickname, the Tigers. However, the descriptor "Plainsmen" and "War Eagle" battle cry are also linked to the school, Johnson (n.d.) said, adding:

“One of the many things that sets it apart is its abundance of nicknames. It is a point of pride amongst fans of the ‘big blue’ and a source of antagonism for their rivals. So what’s the deal with all the names?”

The university explains that War Eagle “is Auburn's battle cry —not a mascot or nickname” with a “long history and deep significance among the Auburn Family who use it to greet and identify with each other all over the world” (Auburn, n.d.). Figure 3 shows the rally cry on a flag.

Figure 3
War Eagle with Auburn University logo (Alumni Hall)



The origin story for “War Eagle” dates back February 20, 1892, when Auburn first met Georgia on the gridiron (Auburn, n.d.). A Civil War veteran attended the game with a pet eagle that he found on a battlefield during the war, adding:

“According to witnesses, the eagle suddenly broke free and began majestically circling the playing field. As the eagle soared, Auburn began a steady march toward the Georgia end zone for a thrilling victory. Elated at their team's play and taking the bird's presence as an omen of success, Auburn students and fans began to yell ‘War Eagle’ to spur on their team. At the game's end, the eagle took a sudden dive, crashed into the ground, and died” (Auburn, n.d.).

But the cry “War Eagle” endured, said Johnson (n.d.), adding:

“The War Eagle chant has become a war cry, greeting, and a source of unity between Auburn fans everywhere. Two strangers in a foreign country might walk by one another wearing similar AU hats and with a simple nod and “War Eagle” they have an instant bond.”

Kazek (2016) added that: “A hearty ‘War Eagle’ is always welcomed when you see a like-minded person across an airport concourse or in a restaurant while visiting the beach. If a person wearing an Auburn shirt is within hearing distance, you give a short wave and a warm ‘War Eagle.’”

Fanbuzz: Top 11 Rally Cries in College Football

Fanbuzz, a digital sports media company, published a subjective list of what it considered to be the top 11 rally cries in college football. Said the accompanying narrative, “College sports chants and greetings can be dated back years, and each one has its own iconic history passed down through generations of alumni (Duffley, 2022).” The 11, listed from bottom to top by Fanbuzz, are:

- **No. 11: "Rock Chalk, Jayhawk, " University of Kansas:** “Used as a wild chant during college basketball games at Allen Fieldhouse, as well as Kansas football games, "Rock Chalk, Jayhawk" dates all the way back to 1886, with credit going to the university's science club and geology department (Duffley, 2022).”
- **No. 10: "Rocky Top," University of Tennessee:** “Rocky Top was originally recorded by the Osborne Brothers and was adapted by the Pride of the Southland Band in the 1970s and immediately stuck (Duffley, 2022).”

- **No. 9: "Ski-U-Mah," University of Minnesota:** "After John Adams, the University of Minnesota rugby captain, heard Sioux boys exclaim "ski-yoo" after winning canoe races on Lake Pepin. In 1884, Adams decided to come up with a chant for his team incorporating the Sioux cry (Duffley, 2022)."
- **No. 8: "Boomer Sooner," University of Oklahoma:** "Used as a greeting, the university fight song and a callback chant, the "Boomer Sooner" fight song was written by Arthur M. Alden, a student in history and physiology at OU in 1905 (Duffley, 2022)."
- **No. 7: "Hotty Toddy," University of Mississippi:** "Hotty Toddy and Ole Miss are inseparable. It first appeared back in a (1926) copy of the Mississippian (student newspaper) and immediately stuck. After the initial call, fans call out, 'Hell Yeah! Damn Right!' then continue with 'Hotty Toddy, Gosh almighty; Who the hell are we, Hey!; Flim Flam, Bim Bam; OLE MISS, BY DAMN!' (Duffley, 2022)."
- **6. "Wooo, Pig Sooie," University of Arkansas:** "The Hog Call dates back to the 1920s. A group of farmers, showing support for an underperforming football team, decided to start squealing like hogs. Apparently, the tactic worked and the Razorbacks won the game (Duffley, 2022)."
- **5. "O-H-I-O," The Ohio State University:** "Originally, "O-H-I-O S-T-A-T-E" was the chant, and it was sung to the melody of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" by U.S. Navy sailors. After learning the chant while a member Navy, Matthew Sidley joined the cheerleading squad at Ohio State and taught the cheer to fans at Ohio Stadium in 1947. The second part was ultimately dropped, and the now famous chant was born (Duffley, 2022)."

- **4. "We Are...Penn State," Penn State University:** “Added in as the unofficial words to stadium anthem ‘Zombie Nation,’ this call dates back to 1946. Penn State was told by the University of Miami Hurricanes that its two black players were not allowed to play in the road game. The team's captain said ‘We are Penn State, ’ and the team unanimously agreed. The game was canceled, and a Penn State tradition was born (Duffley, 2022).”
- **3. "Roll Tide," University of Alabama:** “The origins of the phrase are scattered, with so many stories of its first use that I chose to digress, and explain it like this — everyone in the state of Alabama would probably prefer the first words their child says to be, ‘Roll Tide.’ (Duffley, 2022).”
- **2. "I Believe That We Will Win," U.S. Naval Academy:** “The cheer, popularized by the U.S. men's soccer team run at the 2014 World Cup, actually came from a U.S. Naval Academy cheerleader, who first started the cheer in 1999 at the annual Army-Navy game (Duffley, 2022).”
- **1. "Seminoles War Chant," Florida State University:** “FSU's war chant first happened randomly during a 1984 football game. The Marching Chiefs band began playing a portion of what became the iconic war cry, and it became a stadium-wide hit at home college football games ever since (Duffley, 2022).”

The use of mottos and taglines in higher education

While there is little scholarship research on rally cries, there is much scholarly and commercial work about the role and importance of similar brand and identify expressions, such as slogans, mottos, and taglines in higher education, which share a lineage to rally cries in helping define or express admiration for an institution.

Spry, Foster, Pich and Peart (2020) described the way a university manages its brand management as a “an important element of the student experience and signifies the level of brand promise,” and cited that “strong brand image is of significant importance to student recruitment performance,” adding:

“Previous studies suggest that stakeholders who experience one or more university brand messages... form images of that university, regardless of whether this process is actively managed by universities. University brand communication literature centers on how the brand markets itself through communications both internally and externally. Some research suggests that university brand communications take the form of 'relationship marketing', and that institutions are not marketing their products, but rather the brand associations that will be made” (Spry, et al, 2020).

Shahnaz and Qadir (2020) demonstrates that the use of slogans in building higher education identities is not confined to the United States. Their study examined 10 public and five private universities in Pakistan for similarities and differences of intent and content. Their research, drawing from private enterprise as well as higher education, categorized slogans into two major types: Hard-sell and Institutional.

They defined hard-sell slogans as “highly competitive, as it includes the prominent characteristics of the service or the product being advertised.” Institutional slogans, they write, “establishes the prestigious image” to enhance a product or service, which they conclude are preferred by the universities they studied. They also note the value of a “unique catchword that contributes well” in promotional campaigns (Shahnaz and Qadir, 2020). Also, while assessing the growing competitive nature of the Pakistani higher education market, they connected what they described as client success, inferring to the recruitment of students, to the creation of a

successful brand. “It is also an innate nature of people to be identified by something successful,” they wrote, “because the association with a less or unsuccessful brand or identity is difficult to manage.” (Shahnaz and Qadir, 2020).

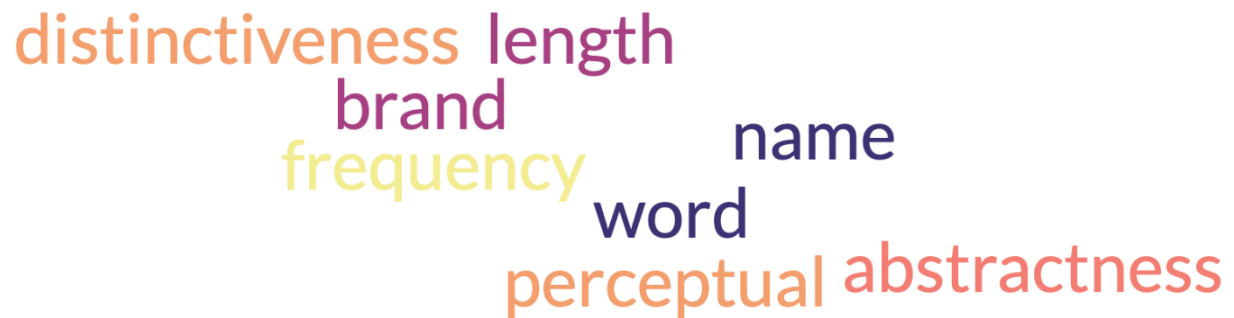
Graff (2022) asserts that marketing messages come in different forms:

“Slogans come in different forms. There are mottoes, sometimes engraved in the school’s seal. Harvard’s is the famous Veritas—Latin for ‘truth’—in its seal, while Yale has Lux et Veritas, ‘light and truth,’ in both Hebrew and Latin. But those ancient mottoes are challenges, not boasts. They weren’t chosen by 17th-century Puritans or 18th-century Congregationalists to meet modern marketing needs. So if you look at some of the examples of trendy mottoes on the SloganSlingers’ website, they include ‘Minds Move Mountains,’ from the University of Oregon; ‘No One Like You. No Place Like This,’ from the University of North Florida; and Auburn University’s inarguable ‘Because This Is Auburn.’ Beyond mottoes and slogans are promotional pitches that you might find in TV spots like Alabama’s ‘Where Legends Are Made’ but also peppered in university endowment campaigns, presidential speeches, and pronouncements from different offices or departments, and both student and athlete recruitment” (Graff, 2022).

Hodges, Estes and Warren (2023) examined practices in this area in an effort to determine the best words for such efforts, asking about 1,000 students and online workers “to tell them how much they liked, or disliked, a subset of slogans.” Later, they applied a “surprise recognition test” to see which slogans they remembered seeing earlier. Figure 4 visually summarizes the five linguistic properties they said “had opposing effects on whether a slogan was liked and remembered.”

Figure 4

Word cloud of five linguistic properties of effective slogans
(Hodges, Estes and Warren, 2023)



The researchers concluded that “slogans that were longer and included the brand name (*Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there* vs. *Like a neighbor*) were more frequently remembered but liked less. Conversely, slogans that included words that are more frequently used (*bad breath* vs. *halitosis*) and abstract (*disease* vs. *halitosis*) were better liked but less well remembered” (Hodges, et al, 2023).

The Tagline Guru’s 2016 process referenced earlier also analyzed language found to be most common among the about 400 respondents who participated in its review. The company asserted (without ranking) these 10 words and/or word combinations to be the most used among those surveyed: Excel/Excellence; Experience; Freedom; Future; Know/Knowledge; Learn/Learning; Light; Truth; Wisdom/Wise; and World (Swartz, 2016).

Some white papers by marketing professional pose the question of whether taglines have past their prime. In a 2017 article by commercial marketing professional Ryan Millburn argues that “most higher education taglines are Weekend-at-Bernie’s-esque lifeless husks that do little more than reflect the pool of ‘generispeak’ in which they float,” adding:

“While there are some shimmering linguistic pearls in the sea of stank tagline clams, even great taglines appear dead by association, their luster clouded by the oily excretions

of their counterparts. But how did the tagline sea get so polluted with garbage? Or, if I can mix metaphors, why did taglines flat-line” (Millburn, 2017)?

Millburn (2017) that “fear kills bold, distinctive taglines—the fear that a core message will not be conveyed, that a constituency’s needs not be met, that a concern raised in a focus group go unaddressed. To assuage these fears, institutions of higher education turned to generic language.” Generic terms like Excellence and Community are “safe, it’s familiar, and, by saying nothing truly distinctive, colleges and universities imagine that they can say everything to everyone (or I would argue, nothing to anyone).” He also points a finger at the tendency and practice by universities to relegate decisions to committee and to be as inclusive and equitable as possible to all operational units:

“Our attitude toward marketing messages fired the first shot; writing-by-committee fired the second; group testing, the third. In this autopsy of taglines, we’ll further examine these causes of death and then pull a Dr. Frankenstein and jumpstart their hearts. Many taglines die at the hands of the people who want to see them succeed the most—namely, the marketing communications staffs of colleges and universities, the presidents, the board members, the devout senior professors who have helped build the academic reputation of an institution through years of tireless service. These well-meaning individuals often commit the cardinal sin of tagline creation—they expect a single phrase to communicate every subtle nuance of their institution’s complex character, its rich heritage, its founding principles” (Millburn, 2017).

For those reasons, Millburn warned his marketing colleagues in higher education to “never test your tagline,” saying:

“Let’s face it, your institution isn’t—and shouldn’t be—for everyone, and if your tagline is coherently communicating the character of your institution, it shouldn’t resonate with everyone either. Presenting tagline options to a group of prospective students, parents and alumni is a great way to turn a quirky, compelling tagline into target practice for amateur critics, or worse yet, an exercise in dilution” (Millburn, 2017).

Illustrating the difficulty in reaching complete consensus on such efforts, Graff (2022), notes that “leadership by sloganeering has grown relentlessly over the subsequent decades – as has the gap between the claims and the realities,” adding that:

“The slogans themselves come increasingly from campus marketing departments that are ignorant of academic missions, as well as from corporate agents and marketing firms further removed. But university leaders happily trumpet them, in the misguided belief that they constitute bold ‘visions’ for the institutional future” (Graff, 2022).

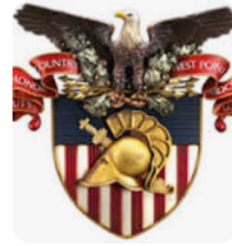
Rubincan & Kingsfield (2019) said that mottos typically “speak to nobler sentiments than most contemporary discourses coming out of universities. The motto seeks to address the timeless ideals of education rather than the pedestrian cupidity of modern marketing.”

One such example of an established university motto is “Duty, Honor, Country,” from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, adopted in 1898 as part of a coat of arms designed for the institution. Figure 5 provides an illustration of this motto and its institutional emblem.

Figure 5

Google search of West Point website (Google)

The emphasis on personal character is to support the West Point Motto - "Duty, Honor, Country" - and the ideals of the seven Army Values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.



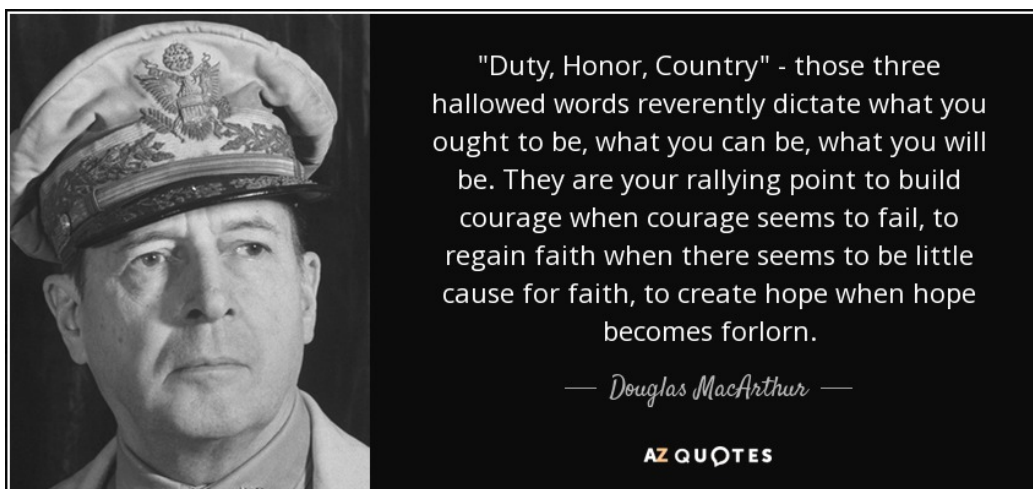
United States Military Academy West Point

In describing the work of a committee headed by Army Col. Charles Larned to design West Point's coat of arms, the academy's website (West Point, n.d.) said:

"The eagle is grasping a scroll bearing the words 'West Point, MDCCCII (1802), USMA,' and the motto, 'Duty, Honor, Country.' The motto as such was never previously stated, but in writings of early superintendents, professors, and graduates, one is struck by the recurrence of the words 'duty,' 'honor' and 'country.' Colonel Larned's committee believed Duty, Honor, Country represented simply, but eloquently, the ideals of West Point (West Point, n.d.)."

Figure 6

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur (A-Z Quotes)



But it was a May 12, 1962, speech at West Point by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, one of the nation's most renowned military leaders and both a graduate and former superintendent of the academy, that elevated the "Duty, Honor, Country" motto to a rally cry. MacArthur, in what would be his last time at his beloved West Point, threaded his address to cadets with frequent references of "Duty, Honor, Country," reinforcing his belief that "those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn (MacArthur, 1962)." He continued:

"The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and, I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule. But these are some of the things they do. They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for action; not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future, yet never neglect the past; to be serious, yet never take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the

meekness of true strength. They give you a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a freshness of the deep springs of life, a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, an appetite for adventure over love of ease. They create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman” (MacArthur, 1962).

Eventually registered by the Department of the Army as a trademark (Alter, n.d), the general’s powerful speech, the last major address before he died, propelled the motto into marketing expressions for both the Army and the academy and is recited in speeches and at events as a rally cry for military service. Figure 7 shows it expressed on a commercially sold T-shirt.

Figure 7

T-shirt bearing the U.S. Military Academy’s motto, also used as a rally cry (Nudge Printing)



Taglines, which “can be derived from mission statements or brand promises,” usually “live much longer than shorter-term campaign slogans,” Jimerson (2016) said, adding, “Taglines

are supposed to provide context or additional meaning to the brand name and are particularly useful when introducing new entities into the world” (Jimerson, 2016).

Figure 8

Oberlin College tagline (Oberlin College)



The terms “mottos” “slogans” and “taglines” are often used interchangeably, a review of research shows. In 2016, Tagline Guru, a marketing and branding company, gathered mottos of about 400 respondents to a survey of about 1,500 higher education institutions, then asked about 250 advertising professionals for assessments. They awarded Oberlin College, a private institution in Oberlin, Ohio, as having the top tagline at that time, which was, “Think one person can change the world? So do we” (Swartz, n.d.). Figure 8 provides an illustration of that tagline.

The nine other taglines that were ranked among the top 10 by the process are:

- “A voice crying out in the wilderness,” Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.
- “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity,” Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio;
- “Splendor without end,” Boise State University, Boise, Ohio.
- “Be opened,” Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

- “North of ordinary,” University of Maine, Presque Isle, Maine;
- “We’re not for everyone...but then, maybe you’re not everyone,” Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, North Carolina
- “Duty, honor, country,” U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York;
- “The character of success,” Bryant University, Smithville, Rhode Island;
- and “The wind of freedom blows,” Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

A rally cry, however, can best be described as a “hook” or a “catchphrase” that is “designed to catch people’s attention (Jimerson, 2016),” often slogans you can lead a marketing campaign with. Jimerson elaborated:

“Effective slogans are casual, memorable, repeatable in conversation, and sometimes they even get turned into musical jingles. Repetition, rhyme, or alliteration help make slogans memorable and easy to say. Slogans can also be thought of as battle cries, often used skillfully by higher ed athletic departments to rally fans (and to sell tickets). Ideally, a slogan will cause people to feel something — hope, belonging, school pride, or whatever emotional quality you want associated with your brand. (Jimerson, 2016)”

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Given the lack of academic research on rally cries, and the subjective nature by institutions gauging effectiveness by institutions of such devices, it was challenging to build a substantial academic study on this topic. This underscored the importance of adhering to established research design theories and practices in this study.

Restatement of the Problem and Interview Process

This study identified rally cries at select institutions and provides context on how those words are being used and how effective they are in building community. In doing so, a primary goal of this study was to find common threads between those slogans that have achieved greater acceptance and permanence. The study reached out to marketing executives and/or administrators at select institutions on The Princeton Review's 2025 list of the nation's top colleges and universities to serve as an interview group. Seven agreed to be participants and interviews with them attempted to determine whether these institutions recognize and can identify whether they have a rally cry and whether and to what extent it has achieved recognition from its respective communities.

The interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom, then were transcribed by Zoom's software and reviewed by the researcher. A copy of the edited transcription was provided to each participant for their review. No changes were requested by participants.

The main areas covered in the interview, rooted in research questions, included: 1) Discussion to determine whether the participant could identify a rally cry of the institution (all seven confirmed the existence of a rally cry at their institutions); 2) How that rally cry originated; 3) How the rally cry was used within the institution; 4) How that rally cry was used

outside the institution; 5) How the rally cry was leveraged as an asset to build community, raise money or used strategically (e.g., fundraising, admissions, marketing). The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix A of this paper.

Research Design

Interviews were drawn from a straightforward qualitative study, which Creswell defined as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994). It is exploratory by design and can provide contextual understanding of subject or topic. It allows for the exploration of variations, relationships and patterns among the responses. It also lends well to the examination of multiple cases and comparison of those cases, as well as contextual analysis of the data.

The research consisted of interviews with participants at each of the seven institutions with deep understanding and in-depth familiarity with the use and potential of rally cries, not only at their institution but also within higher education. Online research allowed the interviewer to supplement these interviews with the collection of artifacts related to the participant’s institution and rally cry. Further, the completion of analytic memos aided the researcher in identifying key attributes of the participant’s rally cry as well as similarities and differences between attributes cited from among all participants.

Questions were broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Positionality

Attributes of the researcher, including socioeconomic status, demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age, ethnicity), as well as personal, professional, and other relevant experiences, can play a role in the context of the research setting. (Berger, 2015, as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The dialogue of the researcher can potentially transmit identity and cultural position, which makes it relevant to understand the researcher's background. I am a retirement-eligible, 15-year-plus senior administrator at a public state university, who entered higher education (my first and only job thus far in the industry), where I earned my master's degree and where I am pursuing a doctoral degree. I joined the university after more than 25 years as a photographer, reporter, editor and senior executive for professional media groups (mostly newspapers and websites) in seven states. I am a citizen of the United States of America, Christian of German and English heritage and a male, who has been married for 37 years and, as a couple, my spouse and I have had four children. My father, paternal grandfather, stepbrother, maternal uncles and two maternal first cousins served in the military. My mother and father attended and graduated from a chiropractic college after World War II, where they met, and later worked as employees of a furrier business owned by my maternal grandfather and one of my material uncles that was in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, where I was born.. I am an Eagle Scout in Scouting America (formerly Boy Scouts of America) and I serve as a U.S. Army Reserve Ambassador, a federal Special Government Employee with a protocol rank equivalent of a two-star general, and a lieutenant colonel and member of the national Board of Governors of Civil Air Patrol, the volunteer civilian auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force. Each of these elements has contributed a significant part of my personality and cultural identity.

In my current roles at Middle Tennessee State University as vice president of marketing and communications, spokesman and executive producer of True Blue TV, the television and streaming platform of the university, I analyze data as well as prepare and execute marketing, branding and communications strategies to tell the stories and raise the visibility of my institution. Further, in 2011, I originated and continue to amplify “I am True Blue,” which has become a hybrid rally cry and slogan of MTSU, and I am an ex-officio member of the Athletics Committee at the university.. Considering positionality in the framework of my proposed study, I acknowledge that elements of experience that might reduce the effectualness of my objectivity, assessment, realm of study. Therefore, it was crucial for me to remain open-minded and inquiring in my role as a researcher and my chair and committee has helped me remain cognizant of implied or expressed biases.

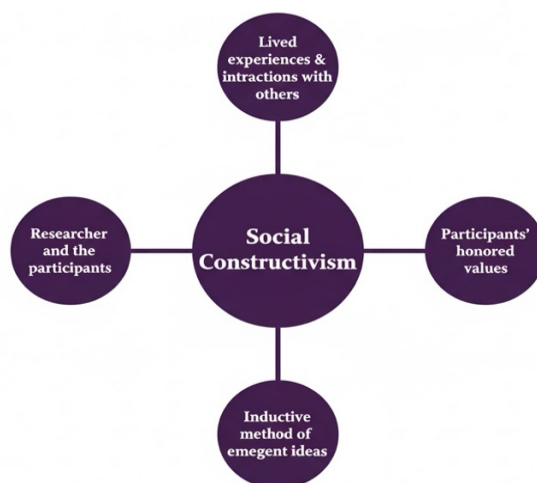
Social Constructivist Framework

This research is a qualitative instrumental study from a social constructivist framework with a holistic viewpoint for data analysis. Figure 9 portrays a visual of the social constructivist paradigm and elements contributing to the researcher’s overall framework.

Figure 9
Social Constructivist Framework
(Creswell and Poth, 2018)

Social Constructivist Framework and Philosophical Belief

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Poth, 2018



Social Constructivism has four key tenets: 1) Experiences and interactions with others, obtained through individual experiences and interactions within a social context; 2) Honored values and perspectives of the participants, which are central to the inquiry and respected as important elements; 3) Inductive method of emergent ideas, which includes gathering specific observations (data) first, from which general themes, patterns, and theories (emergent ideas) are developed; 4) Collaborative and interactive relationships between the researcher and the participants, adding to the construction of understanding (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

In this study, the researcher's aim is to prioritize and elevate any findings grounded on the participants' viewpoint about the institution rally cries. Due to the focus on participant perspective, an instrumental constructivist case study does not start by selecting or formulating a theory. Rather, the researcher designs or inductively creates a relationship or theory of

understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions were broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, which is typically developed in discussions or interactions with others (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Population and Sample

The qualitative data acquired through the interviews of the marketing and branding executives at institutions drawn from the Princeton Review's 2025 list of the top 390 colleges and universities in the U.S. The researcher reached out via email invitations to 30 executives at institutions included on the Princeton Review's list. The initial 30 invitations were selected to include a mix of institutions. After sluggish responses – only one confirmation from the original invitations – follow-up contacts were made via emails and phone calls to determine whether the initial communications were lost or needed to be routed to another official in the institution, which resulted in seven confirmations of marketing or athletics professionals for participation with sufficient diversity of institutions for size, governance and location. After completion of the seven interviews, it was evident that saturation was reached.

Protecting the Privacy of Participants

Due to the restrictions placed upon the research to protect the confidentiality of participants, certain information and observations emerging from the interviews are presented in a manner that obscures:

- The name and title of the participant
- The name and precise location of the participant's institution (it is, however, referenced in broad geographic terms)
- The rally cry of the participant's institution

- Identifying factors of the rally cry at the participant’s institution (e.g., colors, mascot name, specific names, other names tied to area or institution)
- The colors and mascot of the participant’s institution
- References about other institutions that might identify the participant’s institution or location

Table 1 provides a summary of the information about the participants and their institutions that could be disclosed while honoring the commitment made to confidentiality.

Table 1
Background Information of Study Participants

| Pseudonym | Public/Public Flagship/Private | Approximate Enrollment | Geographic Region | Expertise/Duties |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Participant 1 | Public Flagship | 12,000 | Northeastern U.S. | Marketing Executive |
| Participant 2 | Public | 50,000 | Upper Midwest U.S. | Athletics Executive |
| Participant 3 | Public Flagship | 34,000 | South Central U.S. | Marketing Executive |
| Participant 4 | Private | 1,200 | Upper Midwest U.S. | Alumni Engagement Executive |
| Participant 5 | Public Flagship | 50,000 | North Central Midwest U.S. (West of Mississippi River) | Athletics Executive |
| Participant 6 | Public Flagship | 67,000 | Midwest U.S. (East of Mississippi River) | Marketing Executive |
| Participant 7 | Public | 21,000 | Southern U.S. | Marketing Executive |

Instrumentation

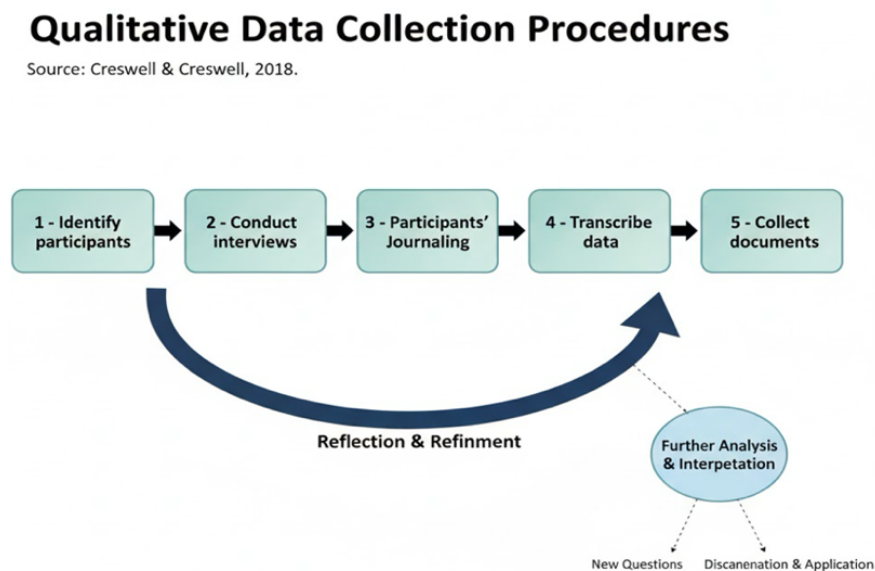
The primary instrument of this study was open-ended questions, conducted through interviews over Zoom, about institutional rally cries that sought detailed responses.

- **Interviews:** Open-ended interviews were conducted, which went in-depth on some participants' experiences, opinions and perspectives on the use of rally cries.
- **Content Analysis:** Done to identify themes, patterns, and meanings.

Data Collection Procedures

Following guidance set forth by Creswell and Creswell (2019), the researcher in first identified potential participants from the Princeton Review's 2025 list of the top 390 best colleges and universities. After having identified each participant, a time was arranged for an interview to be hosted over Zoom. Then, after obtaining informed consent and permission to record, the researcher used the interview protocol (found in Appendix A) and relevant follow-up questions to explore the institution's rally cry and the extent of its influence. The researcher transcribed the data and examined it for verbal codes that would aid in the recognition of common elements between the different participant interviews. Finally, the researcher collected online documents to augment the interviews as necessary. The researcher did not request or employ journaling by participants. Figure 10 illustrates the qualitative data collection procedures outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

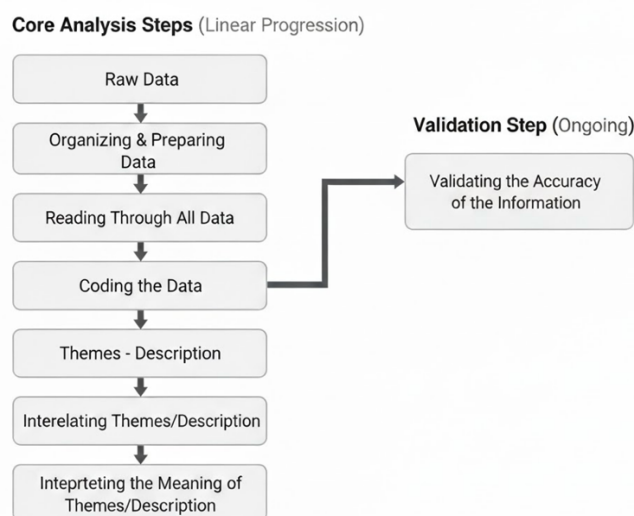
Figure 10
Qualitative Data Collection Procedures
(Creswell & Creswell, 2018)



Data Analysis Procedures

Once interviews were completed, each was transcribed, a memo was completed by the researcher, and a summary of researcher thinking as well as the cleaned transcript were provided to the participants for member checking. In no cases did participants offer any requested changes. After this, the researcher completed the first cycle of coding employing Open Coding, drawing on In Vivo and Descriptive Coding as described by Saldana (2013). A second cycle of coding was then completed using Pattern Coding to identify categories and subsequent themes among the emergent categories. The procedures for data analysis, outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), are illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11
Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures
(Creswell & Creswell, 2018)



Patterns emerged as the data was collected and analyzed, making it vital to avoid preconceived notions or theories before a proper analysis. To that end, it was necessary to employ the practice of bracketing to strive for greater objectivity in the study: Self-reflection (identifying preconceptions about the research); setting aside such biases (bracket such preconceptions) during data collection and analysis; a commitment to being open minded; and, after the data has been collected, refer back to those brackets and determine if they may have had an influence. To do this, the researcher reviewed the transcript produced from each interview and, while coding key phrases and attributes from the participant, often bracketed observations by the researcher that came from review of participant responses. The researcher then reviewed and reflected upon any brackets to consider whether undue influence was evident.

Memoing, or writing down thoughts, insights and observations as the data is collected, was another tool, allowing organization of initial interpretations and impressions, helping to make sense of connections and themes emerging in the data points (and noting and checking any

bias that might creep in from the researcher). Table 2 lists the research questions, corresponding sources of information and corresponding data analysis tools.

Table 2
Logic of Research Design

| Research and Interview Questions | Corresponding Source of Information | Corresponding Data Analysis/Reporting Procedures |
|--|---|--|
| <p>RQ1: Does the institution have a rally cry that is readily known?</p> <p>IQ1: Does your institution have a rally cry that is readily known?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews: “Some higher education institutions have rally cries. It's a phrase that is found enduring residence, transcends marketing and advertising, becomes a shared expression of identity and community. Roll Tide, I sent you that as an example. True Blue has kind of become that, War Eagle, Hotty Toddy, you know them all, you're in the business, so... Given that definition of a rally cry, does your institution have one that is readily known?”</p> <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |
| <p>RQ1a: Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Admin)</p> <p>IQ1a: How is it used internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So, my subset question to that, is it known within your university community by faculty and staff?” | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | <p>Currently enrolled students, do they... they say that too?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What about academics? Embracing, distant, neutral?” <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | |
| <p>RQ1b: Externally (In the community)</p> <p>IQ1b: How is it used externally (In the community)?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews: “That gets to the second part: Is it known and used beyond the campus: Alumni, supporters, community members, and others?”</p> <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |
| <p>RQ2: If yes, does your rally cry have an origin story (how it came into existence)?</p> <p>IQ2: If yes, do you know the origin story of your rally cry (how it came into existence)?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews: “Do you know its origin story, when it started, how it started?”</p> <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |
| <p>RQ3: To what extent is your rally cry embraced in other areas of the university beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?</p> <p>IQ3: To what extent is your rally cry embraced in other areas of the university beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Does it get baked in on the things about, when you're describing someone, or you're <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | <p>complimenting someone?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Is it a greeting or an accolade?" <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | |
| <p>RQ3a: Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Admin)</p> <p>IQ3a: Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews: "You know, obviously you described it's used in athletics. Is it used in academics? Would a sociology professor who may not have anything to do with the football team or any of your teams likely to say it?"</p> <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |
| <p>RQ3b: Externally (In the community)</p> <p>IQ3b: Externally (In the community)?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "In addition to the inside the community, what about outside, like, alumni supporters, community members? Does the rally cry naturally come out of their mouths, too?" • "Is it used beyond the campus. Alums, supporters, community members, and maybe even | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | <p>people that never graduated from (institution)? ”</p> <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | |
| <p>RQ4: In what ways, if any, is your rally cry used to build community?</p> <p>IQ4: In what ways, if any, is your rally cry used to build community?</p> | <p>Example(s) of specific question(s) used in interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “That's (rally cry) spirit. Is there any kind of iteration like that? Or would that feel like it's kind of forced? ” • “Is it more, hey, you and I are the same, you know, we've got a bond?” • “Do you use it to compliment somebody?” <p>Responses to Questions (filtered by secondary responses)</p> | <p>Open and Pattern Coding</p> <p>Memoing and bracketing</p> |

Summary

Responses from participants were sufficient to draw interesting and relevant observations and, overall, the data proved to be illuminating and insightful, especially in documenting how they are used by different constituencies, particularly the usage beyond athletics; how some have become interactions with friends and strangers; and chronicling the origin stories of such rally cries.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In Chapter 4, the researcher examined, reviewed, and discussed the qualitative data acquired through the interviews of the marketing and branding executives at institutions drawn from the Princeton Review's 2025 list of the top 390 colleges and universities in the U.S. Seven such executives responded and agreed to participate in the research. The goal of the research was to determine whether select institutions recognize and can identify whether they have a rally cry and whether it has achieved recognition from its respective communities. The following research questions guided the researcher through the data collection:

1. Does the institution have a rally cry that is readily known?
2. Does the rally cry have an origin story (how it came into existence)?
3. To what extent are these rally cries embraced in other areas of the university beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?
4. In what ways, if any, is the institution's rally cry used to build community?

Qualitative Case Study Process

During the interview process, the researcher recorded the interviews through Zoom video and stored the videos on a secure jump drive with a passcode. Next, the researcher used Zoom's software transcribing process to start the conversion of the interview recording into text documents individually. The researcher reviewed the Zoom video and compared it to the transcribed document, making corrections and updates as necessary. The researcher then narrowed the data by creating memos of significant perceptions and reflections immediately after

completing each interview to ensure capturing the most accurate information while the interview was fresh.

After completing the transcription process and provide an additional check of the accuracy of the data collection, the researcher shared interview transcriptions with the participants via email. To safeguard against researcher bias, materials were sent after initial coding to the researcher's faculty methodologist for review. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that determining codes and developing themes are key components of qualitative data analysis.

The researcher coded each interview separately using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). These codes represented the participant's insights about the topic. As the researcher cycled through interviews, certain patterns and similar phrasing emerged. Similar codes were sorted from each subject into a particular section within the template. Specific categories emerged from the accounts of the participants' perceptions. The researcher continued to utilize the template to narrow the data representations into the precise themes that characterize the information from the subjects' experiences.

The researcher coded each interview separately using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). These codes represented the participant's insights about the topic. As the researcher cycled through interviews, certain patterns and similar phrasing emerged. Similar codes were sorted from each subject into a particular section within the template.

Participant 1: Marketing leader at a northeastern U.S. flagship public university

Figure 12
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 1 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 1 described an institution without a strong athletics culture, located in a community and region that generally places greater value on individualism rather than being part of a shared community experience. While participant readily identified the institution's rally cry of "Go, (Mascot Name), Go!," it was expressed that ownership and usage of the cry was mostly with alumni and not as prevalent among faculty, staff and enrolled students. However, participant said the administration of the institution, hoping to create a greater sense of campus community, persists in using the rally cry in public communications. Figure 12 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 1 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and

conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Study:** Researcher explained the purpose of his study, which aims to identify and analyze rally cries that have achieved enduring recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, assured confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and outlined how the data would be used. Participant confirmed understanding and agreed to participate, and the interview began with a brief introduction to the concept of rally cries in higher education.
- **Legacy of Rally Cry at Participant's Institution:** Participant discussed the origins and usage of the "Go (Mascot Name), Go" rally cry at participant's institution. Participant explained that while it originated from athletics, it has become a widely recognized and used phrase across the university community, particularly among alumni. Participant noted that the phrase is often used in various contexts, such as administrator emails and commencement speeches, though its usage varies among different groups. Participant also mentioned that the sports culture at institution is relatively insular, with limited athletic events like football, but the rally cry has still managed to permeate the broader university community.
- **School Spirit Initiatives:** Participant explained that "Go (Mascot Name), Go" is used in athletics as an audience cheer and visual identifier, appearing on materials and banners. He described how the institution's student body, while proud of their school, tends to be individualistic and private about their affiliations, unlike more

traditional universities with strong athletic programs. The administration struggles with fostering school spirit, leading to periodic attempts to promote the rally cry to create a stronger institutional identity.

- **Athletic Spirit Anthem:** Participant explained that “Go (Mascot Name), Go” serves as a rally cry and school spirit anthem at the institution, though it's not as prominent as at larger universities. The phrase appears on merchandise and is used during sporting events, particularly to attract male students and engage alumni. While faculty do not widely use it in academic settings, the admissions and fundraising teams incorporate it into their materials to leverage the strong connection alumni have with athletics.
- **Branding Evolution Discussion:** Participant discussed institution's branding challenges, noting that while the university has historically focused on academic prestige, there's a recent shift toward showcasing community and student experience. He explained that “Go (Mascot Name) Go” serves as a rallying cry for athletics and the university, though its usage is less formal than at some other institutions.

Table 3 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 3
 Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 1

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pervasive across university • Commencement, after a speech • It's in the water • Sort of moves over into sort of the regular campus • Complicated piece to that • Faculty and staff use it, but it's not like... • Never gone all-in • Simple phrase, stuck around • Not squarely an academic message | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | Largest institution in a small New England state. State known for individualism. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a simmer, in the background • Marketing more program specific • Don't subscribe to big brand identify pieces | ADMISSIONS | Admissions marketing mostly stresses its teaching and research, as well as role as a medical college and medical center. Beauty of area appears often in outreach. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration struggles with this • They want people to feel a sense of community • Try to use rally cry to get people to be more rah-rah • Be proud, but be quiet about it | NOT MONOLITHIC | |

| | | |
|---|------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School spirit is a little amorphous | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Came from athletics • Sports cheering • We don't have a huge athletics presence • No football • Sports culture is a little insular • Used as a way to get everyone amped up at games | ATHLETIC ORIGIN | Several popular sports typically offered at the Division I level are not present at the university. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go (mascot) go! | MASCOT | Mascot used in rally cries by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution. Mascot is an animal indigenous to the mountains of the state. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go (mascot) go! | GO | GO is used in rally cries by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamp-post banners • Materials around athletics fields • Infrequent use in merchandizing • Marketing more program specific | MARKETING AND BRANDING | A web search did not produce any products for sale featuring rally cry |

Participant 2: An athletics administrator at upper midwestern U.S. public university

Figure 13
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 2 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 2 described an institution that embraces and uses its rally cry, "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)," beyond athletics to build community, revenue and affinity for the entire university. While not the flagship university in its state, the institution has considerable size and strong reputation in both athletics and academics. Its rally cry is interactive and responsive, used widely outside of athletics, embraced by internal campus constituencies, and has transcended marketing to become an emotional touchpoint for those who express it. Further, the institution has trademarked its rally cry and makes it available for appropriate use by commercial sponsors (and the institution is diligent in efforts to deter unauthorized usage). The rally cry appears to be an effective counter to the reach and affinity of the flagship university's slogan in their state. Figure 13 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 2 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and

conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Research:** Researcher explained that the focus of this project is identifying and analyzing rally cries that have achieved permanence and recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher outlined the purpose, duration, and confidentiality of the study, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no compensation would be provided. Participant agreed to participate and confirmed understanding of the study's terms.
- **Traditions in Higher Education:** Researcher and participant discussed the concept of rally cries in higher education, with researcher explaining the institution's "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)" is a widely recognized tradition used internally and externally. Participant shared that the rally cry is trademarked and appears on merchandise, and participant noted its international recognition, even mentioning an encounter in Berlin. They briefly touched on the origin of the tradition, which participant did not know, and discussed how new community members learn these traditions.
- **Rally Cry Traditions:** Participant explained how the "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)" rally cry is used across the institution, particularly in athletics, academics, and various administrative departments. Participant detailed its use in traditions like welcoming new students, ending calls, and as a university trademark. Participants noted that the phrase is incorporated into branding, signage, and marketing efforts, and is often used by the president and development office. Researcher inquired about its use in admissions and fundraising, to which participant confirmed its presence in welcome packages and recruiting materials.

- **University Trademark Usage Discussion:** Participant explained that institution's "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)" is a trademarked phrase used by the university for identification and as a selling asset in sponsorships. Participant mentioned that they police its use and send cease-and-desist letters to non-sponsors who use it commercially.
- **Institutional Use of Color in Branding:** Participant discussed the significance of the primary and secondary institutional colors, explaining how they differentiate the school from the flagship institution in the state. Participant noted that while the university prefers its specific shade of its primary color, they are open to all shades of the primary color, reflecting a broad interpretation of their colors.
- **Origins of Rally Cry:** Researcher and participant discussed uncertainty about the origins and widespread use of the institution's "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)" rally cry. Participant explained that it is not limited to athletics but is used universally at the institution, including professors and alumni.

Table 4 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 4
 Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 2

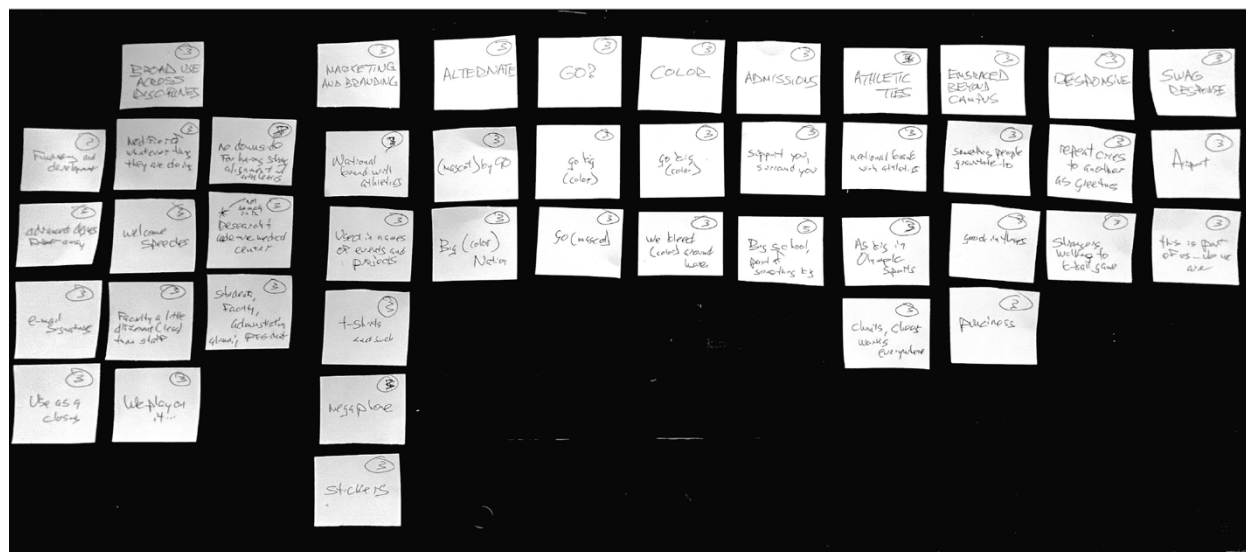
| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We use it a lot internally • Big campus meetings; big department meetings • First speaker (as a warmup or icebreaker) • President leads and ends conversations with it • We don't equate to just athletics; we equate it to being (name of mascot) • Not just athletics • Email signatures and sign offs | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | One website says: We often hear it at football games... in the student section... sometimes we just hear it walking along.. or event professors in class. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EA football video game • Trademarked • Merchandise, used by official sponsors • Painted on walls • Pride in colors • Selling asset • Signage • Police against unauthorized commercial use (send cease-and-desist letters) | MARKETING AND BRANDING | The local newspaper reported the rally cry is among more than 30 trademarked creative assets, including logos, that has been registered by the university. |

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berlin... someone said Go (Color) and caught me off guard! • Grocery store | SWAG RESPONSE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-parter • Go (Primary Color) to initiate • Go (Secondary Color) to respond • Used to greet someone • Used to say goodbye | RESPONSIVE | Observation from Subject 2: They will let you know that you are doing it wrong and how you are supposed to respond. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialty gifts used by all departments • It's everywhere • University and athletics marketing • It's fun! • You quickly learn and adopt to rally cry • Walking down the street • 13-year-old son at lacrosse practice • Sign of respect • It is an international, national, regional, local rally cry • Almost reminds me of your elementary | EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | A campus website says origin of colors is uncertain, but believed that the primary color emerged in 1899 and the secondary color was added in 1903 by the athletics department. |

| | | |
|---|--------------------|--|
| school teacher (getting your attention) | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets most attention in athletics • Used on huge flags carried around field and arena by cheer • Some random fan will start the cry and the stadium will repeat. • Helps draw distinction with in-state rival • Kind of crazy! | ATHLETIC ROOTS | The university is the smaller of two large Division I institutions in state – but both institutions have strong academic and athletic reputations and history. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big (primary color)! Go (big (secondary color) | COLOR | Uses both colors typically associated with institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big (primary color)! Go (big (secondary color) | GO | GO is used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome packets • Prospective student sessions • President has it on the bus he uses for statewide admissions trip | ADMISSIONS | One person said explaining the rally cry was the first thing he heard when he stepped foot on the campus for the first time for orientation. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sessions helped for new students to teach use of rally cry, fight song, other traditions | TEACHING TRADITION | Multiple pages on university website are devoted to teaching tradition. |

Participant 3: Marketing administrator at south-central U.S. public university

Figure 14
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 3 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 3 described an institution with a powerful national athletics brand that has produced a rally cry that has endured for decades: “Go Big (Primary Color).” The word “Big” is as important to the institution as the primary color expressed in the rally cry, as the institution uses the rally cry to remind prospective students and others that it is big enough to have appropriate resources and capabilities. Its origin was uncertain to participant, but participant knows it dates back for generations. The rally cry is widely used inside and outside the campus and it is often used as a modifier or description in the names of upcoming events or activities. The rally cry is used as a greeting among strangers, and it is often elicited upon encountering someone wearing the colors or logos of the institution. Figure 14 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 3 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and

conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Discussion of Rally Cry:** The discussion between participant and researcher focused on the rally cry "Go Big (Primary Color)" as a key identifier for participant's institution. It is widely used and embedded in the university's branding and enrollment materials. Participant noted that while the phrase is primarily associated with athletics, it extends to other areas like academics and healthcare and is particularly appealing to students seeking a large university with strong Division I athletics. Researcher inquired about the phrase's usage beyond students, to which participant confirmed that faculty, staff, and administration are generally familiar with it, though its use in formal settings like welcome speeches is more limited.
- **Impact of Rally Cry:** Participant explained how "Go Big (Primary Color)" is widely used across the institution's campus and athletic events, serving as a unifying cheer and identifier for students, faculty, alumni, and community members. Participant noted its presence in various contexts, from athletic events to healthcare initiatives like blood drives, and shared personal anecdotes about its recognition even in unexpected locations. Researcher inquired about its origins, and participant mentioned would investigate and share the information. Both discussed the universality of "Go Big (Primary Color)" in athletics, highlighting its use in a variety of sports beyond just football and basketball.
- **Origins and Usage:** Researcher and participant discussed the origins and usage of other university-related phrases, tracing their popularity to a radio show and their integration into university culture. Participant explained that "Go Big (Primary Color)" is primarily used to foster a community mindset among students and prospective students, while "Go

(Mascot Name)" is commonly used in email signatures. They also touched on the academic embrace of these phrases, noting that researchers were the only group that had not fully adopted them.

- **Branding and Community Identity:** Participant and researcher discussed the distinct characteristics of the institution's research and healthcare communities, noting that researchers are drawn by faculty and funding opportunities, while students are more attracted to the campus environment. Participant highlighted the strong alumni connection to the university, particularly through philanthropy, and explained how the university's branding evolution separate from the rally cry. Researcher inquired about the use and perception of the "'Go Big (Primary Color)" slogan, which participant described as a unifying and effective three-word phrase that resonates well with the university community.

Table 5 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 5
 Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 3

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students, faculty, alumni, administration, president • Fundraising and development • Modifier of whatever thing they are doing • No downside for having strong alignment with athletics • Research (not so much, though) and medical center • Welcome speeches • Email signatures • Use as closing • We play on it... • Faculty a little different (less) than staff • Advanced degree (holders) further away | <p>BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY</p> | <p>Most known and associated with dominant basketball program, but also used widely for other athletics, campus events and community identification.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National brand with athletics • Used in names of events and projects • T-shirts, giveaways and such • Megaphones of cheer squads • Stickers to projective students | <p>MARKETING AND BRANDING</p> | <p>University is flagship of state, largest university in state. History of national championships. Home to top medical center and teaching hospital in the state. Agricultural extension offices (branded to university) in every county of state. Rally cry frequently used in merchandise.</p> |

| | | |
|--|------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong response to colors, logo worn at airports, in community • This is part of us... who we are • Strangers walking into basketball game | SWAG RESPONSE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat cry to one another as a greeting | RESPONSIVE | Just respond with Go Big (Primary Color) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something people gravitate to • Good in threes • Punchiness | EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | No major-league professional sport in state. Flagship institution. Athletics built on reputation of home-grown talent in 20 th century. One of few statewide touchpoints that diverse regions (urban, rural, farming, mining, mountains, plains) have in common. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National brand with athletics • Just as big in Olympic sports • Chants, cheers, works everywhere | ATHLETIC ROOTS | History of championships. Statewide radio broadcast network of basketball games was unifier. Affinity among people without any direct ties to academics or campus due to athletics success. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big (color)! | COLOR | Dominant color of two typically associated with institution, word combination and color usage not unique to institution. The primary color emphasis in the rally cry gets considerable attention, which has been the institution's primary color since the late 19 th century |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big (color) | GO | GO is used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support you, surround you • Big school • Part of something big | ADMISSIONS | Common usage in admission materials |

| | | |
|--|--------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Mascot) by (number of wins) • Big (color) Nation | ALTERNATIVES | Big (color) Nation used mainly to describe the combination of all affinity groups of the universities. (Mascot) by (number of wins) is a relatively new way for fans to convey that athletic teams will win by a wide margin. |
|--|--------------|---|

Participant 4: Leader at an upper midwestern U.S. private liberal arts college

Figure 15
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 4 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 4 focuses on off-campus engagement for a small liberal arts college (enrollment about 1,200), located in a community of about 10,000. Founded in the mid-1800s, the institution is primarily focused on undergraduate programs and competes in NCAA Division III (non-scholarship). The bond between the institution and the college is extremely strong, as both draw elements of their identities from each other. As such, the expression of its rally cry, “Go (Mascot Name),” has become a way to signal support for both the institution and the city. Figure 15 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 4 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and

conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Research:** Researcher explained that the focus of this project is identifying and analyzing rally cries that have achieved permanence and recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher outlined the purpose, duration, and confidentiality of the study, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no compensation would be provided. Participant agreed to participate and confirmed understanding of the study's terms.
- **Use and significance of rally cry:** Participant discussed the use and significance of the institution's rally cry, "Go (Mascot Name)." Participant said it is commonly used by students, faculty, staff, alumni and even community members, both on and off campus.
- **Origin of the rally cry:** Participant said the institution began as a church-supported entity, so its initial mascot and rally cry was the Fighting (Name of Denomination), which was retired when the institution moved away from the denomination. Participant said the current mascot, which is the core of the rally cry, was developed to pay homage to the ethnic heritage of the city where the institution is located.
- **Use of the rally cry:** Participant highlighted how the rally cry is integrated into various aspects of college life, including sports, academics, admissions, and fundraising, and is even used as a greeting among alumni and supporters. Participant noted that the phrase fosters a sense of community and pride.

Table 6 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying

characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 6
Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 4

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We say it quite often • Faculty, staff, alumni, current students • Administrators in presentations • VP/student affairs at pep rally • Fundraising • Email sign offs and signatures • Way to say Great Job! | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | Rally cry used as signature of new president in introductory letter to campus in university magazine |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Billboard, signage • Throughout community, in the businesses • Use it quite a bit | MARKETING AND BRANDING | Only one item (an aluminum sign) using rally cry on university bookstore site |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking down the street and somebody sees that and says... • Traveling • Airport | SWAG RESPONSE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated back in response to first use • Way to kind of connect • Break the ice | RESPONSIVE | Subject 4 quotes football coach: Nothing better than a good, throaty initiation/response to cry. |

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily known by all alumni and others • Identify for small community • Throughout the community, in the businesses • Connection | EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | Aligns with city/area embrace of ethnic heritage. Small liberal arts college in small community (population less than 10k); strong mutual affinity. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used by all sports • Nothing better than a good, throaty... | ATHLETIC ROOTS | Common cheer. Division III sports; added women wrestling in 2020s |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go (mascot)s! | GO! | GO with mascot name used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go (mascot)s! | MASCOT | GO with mascot name is used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derived from city/area nickname and heritage • Rival rally cry has similar origin story based on its city/area | ORIGIN STORY | City holds festivals and events tied to its nickname and heritage, which line up precisely with institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Not shared since it will identify institution) | ALTERNATIVE CRIES | Used as an expression of admiration |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used in admissions events on campus | ADMISSIONS | |

Participant 5: Athletics official at public north-central midwestern U.S. flagship institution

Figure 16
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 5 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 5 is in senior leadership of the athletics department of a large, major flagship institution known nationally for strong academics and athletics. The institution occupies a special, and perhaps enviable to its peers and rivals, position of visibility and pride among the citizens of its state. With no professional major-league sports franchises competing for the attention and loyalty of its audience, use and wear of logo gear reflecting institution's athletics programs is common spread. Further, the institution's rally cry, "Go Big (Primary Color)," has transcended traditional marketing and branding and expanded beyond athletics, becoming a greeting among friends and strangers, both in the state and anywhere that gear-wearing supporters might spot one another, and a way to signal success in academics, enrollment and

other aspects of the institution and demonstrate alumni pride. Figure 16 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 5 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Research:** Researcher explained that the focus of this project is identifying and analyzing rally cries that have achieved permanence and recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher outlined the purpose, duration, and confidentiality of the study, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no compensation would be provided. Participant agreed to participate and confirmed understanding of the study's terms.
- **University unity:** Participant described the pervasive use of the rally cry at the institution, explaining how it transcends athletics to become a unifying campus and community chant. Participant noted that the phrase is used by faculty, staff, and students alike, and is even recognized beyond the state where the institution is located.
- **Rally cry as greeting:** Participant described the institution's community as family-oriented and deeply loyal to local institutions, with a natural, unforced sense of togetherness exemplified by the widespread use of the rally cry as a greeting. Participant emphasized that this community spirit is not fabricated but genuinely felt by residents, noting that even his young daughter naturally adopted the phrase without being taught. Participant shared numerous personal stories that reinforced the power of the rally cry as

a greeting, including how it was one of the first encounters that participant experiences on day one of employment, how participant's father, wearing a logo hat in another state, encountered the rally cry; and how quickly participant's 6-year-old daughter picked it up.

- **Seeing is believing:** Participant encouraged researcher to experience the community firsthand, asserting that its real and authentic nature cannot be fully appreciated until visited.

Table 7 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 7
Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 5

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University and athletics development • Both sides of the house (academics and athletics) • We're on the same team • Don't know who is athletics and who is not | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | University and athletics development teams combining into a single entity and using rally cry as common thread. Usage found online in academics and athletics alike |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water tower • Every inch of town • Interwoven with each other (city, state, university) | MARKETING AND BRANDING | University is flagship of state, located in the state capital, largest university in state. History of national championships. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day one, off the plane | SWAG RESPONSE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends |

| | | |
|---|------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dad wearing hat in Memphis • More than a greeting • 6-year-old daughter story • I acknowledge; you acknowledge | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You hear someone scream it out • Immediate response • Whole chant behind it • More frequent than you think | RESPONSIVE | <p>Said a Reddit user: There are only two real scenarios:</p> <p>Them: "Go Big (color)."</p> <p>You: "Go Big (color)."</p> <p>This is relatively matter-of-factly done. It's the equivalent of nodding to someone you recognize across the room.</p> <p>Them: "Goooooooo Biiiiiiiiig (Color, with vowel extended out)!"</p> <p>You: "Go! Big! (Color!)!"</p> <p>This is the more important one to get right. It's often quite loud, so you should match the tone of your environment. Your part should be punchy and short. Keep each word brief, with short but distinct pauses between each word.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's everywhere • Everyone knows it • Day one, off the plane • Walking to mailbox • It's one for all • Almost incestuous • Unreal | EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | No professional major-league sports in town. Seen as part of state identity. |

| | | |
|--|----------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not fabricated or a façade• Every inch of town | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Athletics identification• Multiple national championships in football• Not just football | ATHLETIC ROOTS | History of championships and major bowl wins, but none in recent years |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go big (color)! | COLOR | Dominant color of two typically associated with institution; word combination and color usage not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go big (color) | GO | GO is used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |

Participant 6: Marketing executive at a public midwestern U.S. flagship institution

Figure 17
Coding of Interview Data from Participant 6 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 6 is in leadership of marketing and communications at a large, major midwestern institution that serves as the flagship of its state. The institution, which includes a major medical center, has considerable national reputation as a leader in academic and athletics and an impressive history of championships at the national level. Its rally cry, which has transcended traditional marketing and gone beyond athletics, is somewhat unique, and very much interactive, as it involves the spelling out the individual letters of the name of its state in equal measures by the person extended the greeting and the person receiving the greeting. Further, in some instances, this exchange includes gestures that reflect the letters of the state name. The rally cry, which sprang from the introduction of the institution's alma mater song in the early 20th century, is initiated by both acquaintances and strangers, often upon identification of affiliation to the institution through the wearing of gear and logo apparel. Its use is not limited to the institution's state, with commonplace responses taking place around the country and world. Further, the use of the rally cry and gesture occasionally is offered as recognition of those living or from the state where the institution is located rather than just a sign of affiliation to the institution. Figure 17 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 6 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Research:** Researcher explained that the focus of this project is identifying and analyzing rally cries that have achieved permanence and

recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher outlined the purpose, duration, and confidentiality of the study, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no compensation would be provided. Participant agreed to participate and confirmed understanding of the study's terms.

- **Chant Tradition:** Participant explained the tradition of the rally cry, which includes a call-and-repeat style chant that spells out the name of the state where the institution is located. Participant said it is broader than athletics and is used institutionally across the university and in the state. Participant noted that while the cheer "Go (Name of Mascot)" is associated with sporting events, the rally cry is more universally used, as evident by its transcending into physical gestures.
- **Widespread acceptance:** Participant confirmed it is widely used by faculty, staff, students, and administration, as well as by alumni, supporters, and even non-alumni residents of the state where the institution is located. It is used often in admissions and branding.
- **At football games:** Participant discussed the tradition of singing of the institution's alma mater song at the end of football games, which, at the conclusion of the song, prompts those singing to spell out the state name. In addition to football, participant explained that after all major sporting events, teams sing the song and spell out the state name as a communal experience. Participant noted that administrators often participate in this tradition due to their role in bridging athletics, academics, and the medical center.
- **Transcends athletics:** Participant explained that the rally cry transcends athletics and is embraced as a state pride point. Participant noted that the phrase is used in various

merchandise, stadium graphics, and even during the university's convocation ceremony, where incoming students are taught how to perform the school's traditions.

Table 8 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 8
Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 6

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In lyrics of Alma Mater | ORIGIN STORIES | Participant cited as origin Alma Mater song was composed in 1903 by a student; traditionally sung at football games. However, a sports media site linked it back to a cheer that was taught to fans in 1947. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go (name of mascot)! | ALTERNATIVE CRIES | Variant of the state nickname (shortened) and nickname of university mascot |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Airport encounters | SWAG RESPONSE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used in convocation Heritage and ritual training in print materials | EMBEDDING TRADITION | Sent to incoming freshmen and transfers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridges all three campus pillars (medical, academics, athletics) Tribal and communal Broader than athletics | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | Also used/embraced by alumni and fans of athletics. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelled out | RESPONSIVE | Cry spelled out by letters between two individuals: Half the letters as a |

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand gesture | | <p>callout; other half letters as a response. Hand gesture similar to Y-M-C-A spelled out in video of 1978 song by The Village People</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used by many without clear university ties • Considered their property • Institution has leaned into the whole state • Statewide aperture • Transcended the institution | <p>EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS</p> | <p>University is flagship of state, located in the state capital, largest university in state. History of national championships.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing song and break apart and spell out | <p>ATHLETIC ROOTS</p> | <p>Cry stems from alma mater song, which was written by a student athlete who was a glee club member. Head football coach since 2001 has traditionally lead team in singing song and gesture after every game</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in admission campus tours • Heritage and ritual training in print materials | <p>ADMISSIONS</p> | <p>Found in several online videos produced by the university to promote the institution</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used on in-stadium video boards • Seen as asset of institution • T-shirts • Merchandise around rally cry | <p>MARKETING AND BRANDING</p> | <p>Script version of rally cry spelled out by marching band in a 3.5-minute formation at football games. That script formation has been translated into a logo, which is a registered trademark of the university.</p> |

Participant 7: Marketing executive at a southern U.S. public university

Figure 18

Coding of Interview Data from Participant 7 Interview
(Researcher, 2025)



Participant 7 related unique challenges and opportunities in the institution's efforts to use its rally cry to create and perpetuate a shared culture and identity. The institution, founded as a standalone entity less than 60 years ago, began as a professional school for the flagship university in the state, which has a nationally known athletics program and a rally cry that has national resonance. While athletics were added to the mix about 50 years ago, continuation of those programs were called into question about 10 years ago when its governing board discontinued, then reinstated, them. Further, the institution is still known and respected for its medical teaching and research, which means a sizable part of its campus and community lack the affinity for athletics-based spirit given the focus of their studies and work. Nevertheless, the institution has identified its rally cry – “Go, (Name of Mascot)” – to build greater community and recently coupled it with a hand gesture that is catching on as a form of greeting. Figure 18 illustrates the process of coding interview data that the researcher conducted.

An AI-generated summary was produced via Zoom software of the interview with Participant 7 that was compared with analytic memos during the memoing process and after editing obscuring identifying characteristics and eliminating greetings, other pleasantries and conversations unrelated to the purpose of the interview. This summary was supplemented with notes from researcher:

- **Higher Education Rally Cry Research:** Researcher explained that the focus of this project is identifying and analyzing rally cries that have achieved permanence and recognition for higher education institutions. Researcher outlined the purpose, duration, and confidentiality of the study, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no compensation would be provided. Participant agreed to participate and confirmed understanding of the study's terms.
- **Acceptance, History and Hand Gesture:** Participant discussed the institution's rally cry "Go (Name of Mascot)" and its associated hand gesture, noting that while it is less embedded in culture compared to the rally cry of the flagship institution in its state. The rally cry is used by students, faculty, and administrators. Participant noted that the university, about 60 years old, has a younger culture with a rotating mascot history. The hand signal, which went done properly is a representation of the institution's mascot, was introduced about five years ago.
- **Limited Usage of the Rally Cry:** Participant discussed the limited use of the rally cry at the institution, noting that it's primarily used by students rather than faculty and is most visible in undergraduate admissions materials. Participant explained that the mascot is popular among first-time enrolling freshmen but less so in medical and health-related fields, where neither the rally cry nor references to the mascot are frequently used.

Participant mentioned the institution recently underwent a brand refresh, but use of the rally cry remains limited compared to other universities with stronger athletic identities.

- **Challenges to adoption:** Participant explained that the institution has a unique origin as an extension of the flagship, initially focused on medical education, before expanding to include liberal arts and undergraduate programs. Participant noted that the institution's identity is still developing, with a focus on health-related fields and a younger, less established tradition compared to other large public universities.
- **Teaching Tradition:** Researcher emphasized the importance of teaching and establishing a sense of community and tradition, particularly given the institution's relatively young history. Participant shared the institution's journey of establishing its identity, relating that when the now-university separated from flagship, its alumni initially were resistant to the change and only recently changed its colors to reflect those of the university. Researcher further noted that the institution in recent years disbanded, then reinstated, its athletics program, which added an additional challenge.

Table 9 reflects researcher's coding of the interview, using *In Vivo* coding, except when the phrase was extensive in length (then descriptive coding was exercised). Identifying characteristics were removed from participant's responses. These codes represent participant's insights about the topic:

Table 9
Researcher Coding of Interview with Participant 7

| Sample Codes | Categories | Artifact Alignment |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permeated student culture • More focused on undergraduate students | BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | Most known and associated with dominant basketball program, but also used widely for other athletics, campus events and community identification. |

| | | |
|--|------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students more than faculty • Less usage among academics • Email signatures and signoffs • Administrators like myself use | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wonky history • Athletics program disbanded, reinstated recently • Rally cry more so in athletics | ATHLETICS ORIGIN | Founded as university in 1969. Athletics program started in 1979 (men's basketball). Current mascot emerged in 1992. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One hand, some fingers folded, represents mascot | GESTURE | Initiated on visual recognition among strangers and friends; used in conjunction with rally cry. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have to teach it harder • Undergraduate students being taught cry, gesture | TEACHING CULTURE | Observation from Subject 7: Alumni group of medical professions just changes its organizational colors to university (instead of the colors of flagship university that founded the institution) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University only 56 years old • Don't think it is as strong as the (rally cry of flagship institution) • Maybe over time, maybe 30 years, we will see it here | EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | Urban university that was founded as a medical school for the flagship university in the state (flagship is in another city). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gesture used in admissions and promotional photography. • Mascot icon now expressed in admissions materials | MARKETING AND BRANDING | University is an urban, downtown campus; light-pole banners are both marketing and help define campus boundaries. |

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light-pole banners feature mascot and cry | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go (mascot)s! | MASCOT | Mascots used by many other institutions in nation in rally cry; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big (color) | GO | GO is used by many other institutions in nation; not unique to institution |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cry, mascot highlighted in admissions materials • Popular with first-time and freshman students | ADMISSIONS | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as strong as flagship institution • Once in a blue moon does gear elicit a rally-cry response. | SWAG RESPONSE | |

Discussion of Themes

Three themes developed during the interview and analysis process, which are included here, along with a brief researcher interpretation of the summary and are followed by further explanation and organization of the findings that formed the generation of these themes:

- Theme No. 1: Creating Community
- Theme No. 2: Deeper Meaning
- Theme No. 3: Asset of the Institution

Theme No. 1: Creating Community

Each of the seven participants said their rally cry was used to build support, awareness and attention of their institutions, both on and off campus. All seven traced the origins of their rally cries to athletics and usually said cries are said upon sighting someone in logo gear. Those reporting the greatest effectiveness of their rally cry point to its spread into what the researcher describes as The Five As: Athletics, Academics, Administration, Alumni and Advancement.

Table 10, below, lists the aligned categories and related illustrative quotes from the participants.

Table 10

Aligned Categories and Illustrative Quotes in Theme No. 1

| Aligned Categories | Illustrative Quote |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATHLETICS ORIGIN | <p>Participant No. 1: “I think of it first and foremost as, like, an audience cheer.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “Some random fan will just yell, like, (first part of rally cry), and, you know, everyone will yell (second part of rally cry).”</p> <p>Participant 2: “It probably gets the most attention with athletics, because of the TV exposure, and you can hear the rally cries.”</p> <p>Participant 4: “You know, our football coach always likes to say, you know, there’s nothing better than a good, throaty, thick, “Go (name of mascot),” you know?”</p> <p>Participant 6: “What’s interesting is that after major sporting events, particularly football and others, there’s a tradition where the team goes to the sideline where the student section is and they all stand together a sing (the alma mater) and end with the (rally cry and gesture)... that’s tribal, communal, sort of experience.”</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWAG RESPONSE | <p>Participant 2: “I was in Berlin last week, and had some (logo gear) on, and someone said (first part of rally cry) to me and it, like, caught me off guard, because I’m like, who would know that in Berlin?”</p> <p>Participant 4: “There’s a... connection, even if it’s a quick passing in the airport.”</p> <p>Participant 5: “It’s unreal. It’s not, like, fabricated, or a façade. It’s the real thing.”</p> <p>Participant 6: “You’d be walking to an airport, have some (gear) swag on... and someone would just randomly shout</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY • EMBRACED BEYOND CAMPUS | <p>(first part of rally cry) and you would respond with (second part of rally cry).”</p> <p>Participant 3: “I flew to Eugene, Oregon, for some meetings and I had some (logo gear) on. And somebody walks past me in the chair and they go (rally cry)! Eugene, Oregon?”</p> <p>Participant No. 1: “It shows up in all kinds of places, including, like, at the end of administrator emails... it just sort of is in the water a little bit.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “If we’re doing, like, a big campus meeting, or a big department meeting, the first speaker... the first thing they’ll do is say (rally cry), and everybody, like, immediately pipes up and says (response), and then we start the meeting.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “Our president... leads all conversations with that, ends all conversations with that.”</p> <p>Participant 4: “All of our alumni use it.”</p> <p>Participant 3: “Whether it’s through research or academics or, frankly, sometimes even health care.... There’s no downside for us having a strong alignment with athletics.”</p> <p>Participant 3: “It’s the last thing the President, or whomever is speaking, says, makes that (rally cry).”</p> <p>Participant 1: “I see, at least in our community, that a lot of alums that I connect with in town is around games, so (the rally cry) is first and foremost in their minds.”</p> <p>Participant 4: “It’s just kind of a way to, you know, get the community going and celebrate us... it’s a way to break the ice right away.”</p> <p>Participant 5: “When I say it’s everywhere, it’s plastered everywhere. When you are walking around the town, especially on game days, when we’ve got an event going on, you hear someone scream out (the rally cry) and then there is an immediate crowd response of (rally cry) right back.”</p> <p>Participant 6: “This is transcending athletics to just, hey, I’m a member of this community, I’m a member of this state.”</p> |
| <p>Researcher’s Interpretation</p> | |
| <p>The participants from the seven participating institutions can trace the origins of their rally cries from athletics, which tracks anecdotally with the need to inspire and motivate the players and fans of teams. The strongest and most enthusiastic responses about the impact of rally cries among our participants come from institutions with traditions of strong athletics program, which in turn generates fan support, positive responses from constituent communities such as alumni and out-of-market attention. Rally cries become a way for members of those community to identify with the institution – and one another.</p> | |

Five of the seven participants report that their rally cries that have successful transcended athletics and have been embraced by other university entities, particularly academics. Punching through athletics wall and allowing a rally cry to rally more than players and fans on the field has been a benefit to all seven of the institutions surveyed at varying degrees, with some reporting great satisfaction when it is adopted and used to signal the progress of its faculty and students. Several institutions spoke about how the rally cry is used by those not directly tied to the campus to signal their support of the institution. The use of the rally cry and gesture occasionally is offered as recognition of those living or from the state where the institution is located rather than just a sign of affiliation to the institution.

Theme No. 2: Deeper Meaning

Five of the seven participants said their rally cries engender a connection that goes beyond boosterism, which in some cited cases manifests itself through verbal responses and physical gesture. Three of the participants report concerted efforts to teach their rally cries – and, if present, responses or gestures – to incoming students as a way to perpetuate culture. Table 11, below, lists the aligned categories and related illustrative quotes from the participants.

Table 11
Aligned Categories and Illustrative Quotes in Theme No. 2

| Aligned Categories | Illustrative Quote |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GESTURE | <p>Participant 6: “(Part of rally cry) is a call-and-repeat style. Someone would say (first two letters of rally cry) and then someone would repeat (last two letters of rally cry). They’d finish the spelling!”</p> <p>Participant 7: “They have introduced this kind of visual... (number of) figures up, (number of) fingers down. You know, (other) universities do something like that, but they are saying (our rally cry).”</p> <p>Participant 2: “It is a sign of respect.”</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TEACHING CULTURE | <p>Participant 2: “They have an event where (we) welcome students into the stadium and they go through, like, the traditions, the chants.”</p> <p>Participant 6: “They (through special materials prepared for new students) start to get a flavor of some of the traditions and, you know, the spirit stuff.”</p> <p>Participant 7: “A slogan is part of tradition. To me, a slogan teaches people what community you are a part of. It signifies</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RESPONSIVE | <p>tribe, right? I think that's something that has to be taught. And I think we have to teach it a bit harder.”</p> <p>Participant 6: “We had, we switched up our convocation this year. Up until this year, it was a pretty traditional convocation. With, you know, speakers and... I'll just say more traditional. This year, it was switched up to be more student-focused, and focused more on, sort of an experience, and so it was... intended to be introducing and ingraining some of these traditions. So even the University Convocation has switched to teaching the incoming students.</p> <p>Participant 7: “I think what you're seeing is a young university in the making, with traditions in the making. And, this is definitely... a slogan is part of tradition. To me, a slogan teaches people what community you're a part of. It signifies tribe, right? Like, you know, your tribe. And I think that is something that has to be taught. And I think we have to teach it a little bit harder, because we're younger, we're a younger university with less tradition. And, we're not, we're not, like, mired in athletics the way other large publics are, if that makes sense...”</p> <p>Participant 2: “Someone will say (first part of rally cry), and you're supposed to respond (second part of rally cry). And if you respond any other way, they'll let you know that you're wrong, and how you're supposed to respond.”</p> <p>Participant 5: “There's a whole chant behind it. Everyone knows it. You walk, again, and it can be a non-game day and I'm walking to the mailbox, and somebody sees me wear my gear driving down the street and yells (rally cry), it's (rally cry) right back at them.”</p> <p>Participant 2: “It can be used to say goodbye to someone. So, if I am leaving a room, I would say (first part of rally cry) and people would respond (second part of rally cry).”</p> <p>Participant 1: “(It) jumps the athletics fence into sort of the administrator world because they want people to feel a sense of community.”</p> <p>Participant 5: “It's more of a greeting: I acknowledge you, you acknowledge me. We're on the same team... It's just not one of these things that you have to remember to do.”</p> <p>Participant 6: “It's used in an athletics context, but it's more broadly used just institutionally. So you wouldn't necessarily do it in a fan environment.”</p> |
| <p>Researcher's Interpretation</p> | |
| <p>The most successful rally cries among the surveyed institutions appear to be those that have become interactive and responsive, such as a responsive greeting or show of affection through</p> | |

deliberate and recognized gestures that connect to the slogan. This is not by accident, as several participating institutions confirm, and often requires deliberate and intentional acts by the university to teach newcomers the meaning, need and value for such tribal interactions. One institution, which is longing to create a stronger culture, recognizes that teaching tradition and using the rally cry is the long game in becoming successful.

Theme No. 3: Asset of the Institution

All seven participants identified their rally cry as an asset that is used in admissions, marketing and branding, merchandising, internal and external event and activity naming, and sponsorships across disciplines in the institutions. Table 12, below, lists the aligned categories and related illustrative quotes from the participants.

Table 12
Aligned Categories and Illustrative Quotes in Theme No. 3

| Aligned Categories | Illustrative Quote |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADMISSIONS | Participant 2: “Our president does a bus tour, where they go out into the community, and it’s on the bus.” |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MARKETING AND BRANDING | Participant 1: “Three words, simple, like, you can pop them into materials pretty easy that way.” Participant 2: “It’s an international, national, regional, local rally cry.” Participant 5: “It’s on a water tower... You don’t know who is athletics and who’s not... It’s a blend.” Participant 3: “We lean on it (for naming) external, community related events, like when we partner for flu shots... or blood drives.” Participant 7: “I think the hand signal was introduced about five years ago, so I have no idea if people actually do that. I see that represented in a lot of the photography we do with students... ” |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BROAD USE ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ROLES AT UNIVERSITY | Participant 1: “(It) jumps the athletics fence into sort of the administrator world because they want people to feel a sense of community.” Participant 2: “With it being a trademark, licensing really picks up and pushes it well.” Participant 2: “Development uses it a lot... it’s a selling asset for us.” |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Participant 6: “We have a pretty robust affinity and merchandise program (for the rally cry)... we’re selling stuff that has that on it.” |
| Researcher’s Interpretation | |
| Successful rally cries also have proven to be valuable assets for the institution, becoming tools of marketing and branding, fundraising and development and revenue generation. In these best-case scenarios, the rally cries that have crossed over beyond athletics and become identifiable to all facets of the operation. One spoke glowingly about the benefit of registering its institution’s rally cry as a registered trademark – and actively enforcing its rights and usage to drive revenue through merchandise sales and sponsorship rights. Many say it is a viable tool in its admissions and overall marketing and branding. | |

Summary

Interviews with the participants from the seven institutions – three public flagships, two public regionals, one major public state institution, and one private college – produced data points that, as expected, reflected commonalty and differences. These snapshots, however, gave insight into why each have and use rally cries and the potential and actual benefits that the rally cries provide to the institution. While all but one of the participants could not identify the origin stories of their institution’s rally cries, all clearly identified that their slogans were originated and perpetrated from athletics. However, participants who pointed to greater value and benefit of their rally cries could demonstrate that the slogans had transcended both athletics and typical marketing and branding taglines and had become instrumentalities of identity and community of multiple, yet related, populations. The most effective of those rally cries arguably were those that have become affirmations and greetings among and between friends, acquaintance and strangers.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this qualitative case study was to investigate what impact do rally cries have upon select universities and are they effective expressions of their brand; how do such cries build community; and how common is it for them to expand beyond athletics and into other facets of the institution, including, but not limited to, academics, admissions, alumni outreach, and fundraising. The researcher used a qualitative instrumental case study from a constructivist viewpoint to explore the research questions. Open-ended data points were collected through qualitative interviews, which helped determine whether the institutions surveyed had rally cries and, if so, what impact they have upon said institutions. Data gleaned from the interviews align with many of the observations cited in articles and work provided in the Literature Review in Chapter II.

Reflections from the Participant Interviews

The participants from the seven institutions – four public flagships, two state or regional publics, and one private college – were:

- Participant 1: Marketing executive at a northeastern U.S. flagship public university
- Participant 2: Athletics executive at an upper midwestern U.S. public university
- Participant 3: Marketing executive at south-central U.S. public university
- Participant 4: Alumni engagement executive at an upper midwestern U.S. private liberal arts college
- Participant 5: Athletics executive at public midwestern (west of Mississippi River) U.S. flagship institution

- Participant 6: Marketing executive at a public midwestern (east of Mississippi River) U.S. flagship institution
- Participant 7: Marketing executive at a southern U.S. public university

Participant 1 Reflection

Participant 1 described an institution without a strong athletics culture, located in a community and region that the participant said generally places greater value on individualism rather than being part of a shared community experience. Its rally cry is “Go (Mascot Name), Go.” Asked whether the participant’s institution has a rally cry, the participant described its use as a “complicated piece,” but added it was “pervasive across our university.”

“(It) shows up in all kinds of places, including, like, at the end of administrator emails, or... at commencement after a speech, like, it's something that everyone, like, kind of knows, but I don't know that it's been, like, taught, like, it just sort of is in the water a little bit.”

Participant said alumni were “probably ... the greatest, sort of, perpetrators of the rally cry. Then, then, you know, maybe... our C-suite, like, administrators, and then our students and our faculty and, you know, our faculty, staff.” The participant added:

“I don't know that I see a ton of faculty saying Go (Mascot Name), Go, or using it in their course materials, or putting it, like, as a part of anything related to their academic world, but it does show up, like, it sort of exists there, and I think... I don't know that I see a ton of faculty saying Go (Mascot Name), Go, or using it in their course materials, or putting it, like, as a part of anything related to their academic world, but it does show up...”

Participant confirmed the rally cry sprang from athletics but added that the institution does not have a robust athletics culture. Participant did not know its precise origin story:

“It came from athletics, and I'm sure that's true of many other institutions, but the Go (Mascot Name), Go is sort of perpetuated through a rallying cry around, like, sports cheering at our institution. And we don't have a huge athletic presence on our campus. Like, we have a soccer team that did good last year, we have a basketball team that makes it to the NCAA every year, and then we have a hockey team. But we don't have, like, football, there's no tailgating here, the sports culture is a little insular, and so... I think, as a student, you kind of, like, get in, you go to a game, because you're kind of, like, testing out the waters a little bit, and they, you know, say it at the games, and your administrators say things, so it just sort of, like, trickles out into the community a little bit.”

Participant described the rally cry principally as an audience cheer but says it also finds its way into marketing and admissions materials and products.

“I think, you know, I think of it first and foremost as, like, an audience cheer, like, to get everyone amped, to support the sort of athletes that are out on the field or the court. I can hear in my head, like, you know, the crowd cheering it, it sort of exists, and on, like, a leaderboard or something, the Go (Mascot Name), Go is sort of, like, an easy, sort of, like...rally cry visually as well. Like, three words, simple, like, you can pop them in, materials pretty easily that way. So, I think, like, that's first and foremost where it goes. Athletics will use it in materials. Sometimes it shows up on, like, lamp post banners.”

Participant described the institutional school spirit is a little amorphous, saying it attract students “who identify as, like, singular, individualistic people who don't subscribe to big, like, brand identity pieces,” adding:

“We have a student body that, like, likes to be involved, but, like, secretly. Like, we don't have... fraternities and sororities, going around with giant letters on their shirts or anything like that. They'll just wear their, like, flannel and their UGG boots or their L.L. Bean boots, but then, like, go back to their, like, house and sort of do their affiliation on the deal. Like, they like to sort of just be proud but be quiet about it. Which is also sort of like the (Name of State) way of being as well, like, to each their own, everybody's, like, got their thing, but they don't like to, like, be too corporate about it, I guess”

As a result, participant said, the administration “always struggles with this,” and often turns to the rally cry to create a stronger campus culture.

“Like, we have presidents that come and go, and provosts and like, leadership people are like, why aren't people (more) excited.... Why aren't they, like, wanting to connect to our school spirit? And it's like, well, we don't have the athletics thing, we don't have the tailgating culture, like, some of this breeds that, but then they'll start using Go (Mascot Name), Go to try to, like, invite that. Like, they want people to be more rah-rah... And the rallying cry is sort of like an easy end to that. So that's how it sort of, like, jumps the athletic fence into sort of the administrator world, because they want people to feel a sense of community. They want people to engage in this, like, rah-rah brand.”

Participant 2 Reflection

Participant 2 described an institution that embraces and uses its rally cry, "Go (Primary Color), Go (Secondary Color)," which features an interactive component. While not the flagship university in its state, the institution has considerable size and strong reputation in both athletics and academics. Sharing a common trait with all surveyed, this institution's rally cry can trace its origins and initial resonance to athletics, the participant said.

"It probably gets most of the attention with athletics, because of the TV exposure, and you can hear the rally cries, and we have huge flags that the cheerleaders bring out. One says, Go (Primary Color), the other one says, Go (Secondary Color), and they do a chant back and forth. If there's, like, a great play that someone, some random fan will just yell, like, Go (Primary Color), and, you know, everybody will yell, Go (Secondary Color). They'll do chants across the stadium."

Participant said the most popular and distinctive aspect to institution's cry was that it is expressed in two parts, usually as a greeting: Go (Primary Color) as the opening by one person; Go (Secondary Color) as the response by another person.

Participant: "We use it a lot internally, too, so when we start a meeting. if we're doing, like, a big campus meeting, or a big department meeting, the first speaker or, like, our VP, the first thing they'll do is say, Go (Primary Color), and everybody, like, immediately pipes up and says, Go (Secondary Color), and then we start the meeting."

Researcher: "Beyond athletics?"

Participant: " Oh, yeah, yeah, way beyond athletics, yeah. Yeah, I was in a professional development luncheon yesterday, and our VP of Administration started the meeting off,

Go (Primary Color), and everyone said, Go (Secondary Color). And it's kind of... it almost reminds me of, like, your elementary school teacher, like, if... if you can hear my voice, clap one time, you know? It's kind of like that really, like. perks people up and, like, gets their attention and knows, okay, we're starting, we're ready to go. But then, it is used, you know, by fans as well. Like, you could be walking down the street and someone will say, you know, Go (Primary Color), and you're supposed to respond, Go (Secondary Color), and if you respond any other way, they'll let you know that you're wrong, and how you're supposed to respond”

Learning the rally cry – and how to respond to it properly – is expected almost immediately upon introduction or arrival to the campus and its surrounding area, the participant said. This reinforces a theme shared among those institutions whom the participants described as having a successful rally cry – the need for constant education to newcomers of tradition.

“I remember the first time someone said, Go (Primary Color) to me, I responded, Go (Primary Color) because I just thought that's what you respond to. So, I always find it interesting, like, how new people that come into the community? How do they quickly know the traditions, the rally cries, you know, and know how to respond? Is it kind of, you know, what happened to me is I responded, Go (Primary Color), and the person was like, no, you're supposed to say Go (Secondary Color).. You know, that's... and I was like, oh, okay, now I got it, now I got it, you know? But, I always find it fascinating, like, when you... when you have people move into the new community, how they quickly learn and adapt to those... those rally cries...”

“They have a, an event where it welcomes students into the stadium, and they go through, like, the traditions, the chants, you know, what to do, especially with our student groups

and our ... I'm trying to remember what it's called. Like, in basketball, it's called the (after name of head coach). For football, I can't remember what our student section is called, but they'll have a meeting with all the students that are in the student section to go over the chants, the fight song, you know, and really get them up to speed on, you know, the traditions.”

The reach of this institution’s rally cry and response is not limited to the geographic footprint of the institution, the participant said. It is common for strangers to initiate the two-parter rally cry upon sight that someone is wearing gear with the institutional logo.

“I was in Berlin last week, and had some (logo) stuff on, and someone said Go (Primary Color) to me, and it, like, caught me off guard, because I'm like, who would know that in Berlin? And, you know, so I had to, like, quickly be like, oh, Go, (Secondary Color), you know? So, yeah, it is a... it's an international, national, regional, local rally cry.”

The rally cry is also popular and prevalent in merchandising and materials produced for admissions, the participant said, making it valuable not only for community building but also revenue generation for the institution.

“They do (include the rally cry), so in some of the welcome packages and stuff that... through admissions and students and recruiting. They'll get that as well, and again, like, when we have prospective students come on campus, and they're having their sessions, that's how they'll start the session, like, Go (Primary Color). I do know that athletics also, at the beginning of the year...”

“So, it can be used on merchandise, and it can be used by our official sponsors, whether they're a sponsor of the university or a sponsor of athletics. Our alumni clubs... can use it, as well. So, yeah, we've actually trademarked it and use it beyond just, you know, a

rally cry. It's on a lot of merchandise. It's even in, like, the EA football video game. They included it in that. But with it being a trademark, licensing really picks it up and pushes it as well."

Participant 3 Reflection

Participant 3 described an institution with a powerful national athletics brand that has produced a rally cry that has endured for decades: "Go Big (Primary Color)." Participant says the institution leans in on the word "Big" in the rally cry as an attribute for both the university and its nationally known and storied athletics program. As such, the word has meaning not only to the ability and results of the teams, but also the size, scope and opportunities offered by the institution in academic, research and service. It also works well in admissions recruitment and is reflected in marketing by the entire institution. "Big" also is part of an alternative cry, "Big (Primary Color) Nation," which references the entirety of its consistent groups, the participant said.

"(Big) is part of the selling point that we have in our enrollment materials. And we also talk about it to our current students a lot as sort of a retention, space, messaging. And so, you know, this is not uncommon, especially in an (big athletics conference) school. What we hear when we talk to students is: What are some of the reasons why you wanted to pick (institution)? You might be coming from Illinois, Wisconsin. They like the idea of being at a big school, where they can matriculate, but also enjoy Division I athletics and being part of something big..."

"You're an R1, you know, you're doing big things, you've got a medical center. A lot of the researchers are not from here. And they picked where they're doing their research or

their grad studies because of maybe a faculty member or a lab that's being funded, whereas I think, especially our students, that's... it's different.... They're choosing this campus, they're choosing this environment....

“Leaning in on your part of a Big (Primary Color) Nation that's going to support you and surround you is part of the selling point that we have in our enrollment materials. And we also talk about it to our current students a lot as sort of a retention, space, messaging.”

Like all rally cries noted by the study’s seven participants, the institution’s rally cry has its origins and base in athletics – and the rest of the institution is quick to embrace and align its academic success with its athletic success, the participant said.

“The research tells us that athletics is a front door for us. And we're lucky that we have a national brand with athletics that allows us to maybe lean in a little bit more as we talk about our brand. In other ways, whether it's through research or academics, or frankly, sometimes even healthcare. You know, we've got that academic medical center, so there's no downside for us of having a strong alignment with athletics.”

As such, the rally cry is popular among faculty and administrators, the participant said, often finding its way in public speeches, email communications, fundraising and development, marketing and branding and meetings – even naming of events.

“I think administration, can use it sometimes, like, it may make... like, I'm thinking of, when we do our welcome speeches. Students or faculty, it's worked into things like that. Maybe it's the last thing the president or whomever makes that Go Big (Primary Color). So that's not uncommon. I don't see it as much integrated into research. In fact, they probably distanced themselves a little bit from it...”

“If I’m being candid.. Health care, they, they do lean in on it some, usually for external, I would say, community-related events. So, it’s, like, when we partner, like, with, flu shots. They do Big (Primary Color) Flupalooza or something, you know, they, they make a play off Big (Primary Color)... Big (Primary Color) Crush. That’s what we call our, blood drives around here. And so we play on the Big (Primary Color) a lot in those spaces, too...”

“The researchers are just different, and I would say the physician side of (Name of Institution) Health Care mimics, sort of, the research side. I would say, though, that the staff side tends to be a little more like our student population. They tend to be from here, they tend to be, the pride of affiliation, and so I see... I see a lot of the athletics pride in the, in the... in the healthcare staff, too. And so I would say faculty a little different than staff.”

The rally cry is often expressed to signal shared connection between friends and strangers, the participant said. It is popular with alumni and supporters, the participant said, but it is not typically used as a greeting.

I just had this experience last night. I worked a little late, and I was walking to my car. There was a women’s basketball game happening over at the newly renovated (on-campus arena) and I park over by there, and I was walking past people, and we found ourselves saying to each other, ‘Go Big (Primary Color), Go Big (Primary Color), Go Big (Primary Color)’ ...

“And I flew to Eugene, Oregon, last week for some meetings at the University of Oregon, and I’m sitting there, and I had on (logo) stuff, because I like to be comfortable when I fly. And somebody walked past me in the chair, and they go, Go (Primary Color)! ... So,

that's... that's when I also experience it, is when I'm wearing the brand, and I'm in an unexpected place, like... Eugene, Oregon. They didn't expect me there."

Another advantage: The rally cry is simple – just three words – and easy to say, the participant said.

"It's permeation, it's spread, it's effectiveness, it's power... And you know this, you're a communicator, but the old Baptist preacher approaches, things are good in threes. I think that's why Go Big (Primary Color) works so well. It's got that right...punchiness, you know, it just... it works. It works really well."

Participant 4 Reflection

Participant 4 focuses on off-campus alumni engagement for a small private liberal arts college (enrollment about 1,200), located in a small community (about 10,000 population). While the participant said the origin story of the rally cry, "Go (Name of Mascot)," was somewhat murky, the mascot name of the institution came about as a result of a contest held in the 1930s to develop a new moniker; prior to that contest, the institution was known as "The Fighting (Name of Church Denomination)," in recognition of the church that helped found the institution. The winning name was selected as a nod to the ethnic tie of a foreign country that is embraced by its host city, the participant said.

"So I actually asked our football coach this. He's an alum and uses it, you know, a ton, and I kind of said some... even, like, our marketing folks, because I figured that this question would come up. We are not entirely sure. You know, the... so (the institution) used to be the Fighting (Name of Church Denomination), and then eventually became the (Name of Mascot), because it's in (a city that is nicknamed to reflect an ethnic tie to a

foreign country). (The host city)'s nicknamed (Name of Foreign Country), USA, there's (an annual festival celebrating ethnic ties), and so we later became the (Mascot Name)s, and it just became a phrase that people used.

Helping cement the rally cry's permanence was the decision by a nearby rival institution, a similarly sized liberal arts college, that chose as its mascot name a term used to describe a different foreign country, the participant said.

"We were the Fighting (Name of Church Denomination). We moved away from that, because, you know, (Members of Church Denomination) aren't really fighting, I guess. And then (Nearby Rival College) has always been kind of a rival of ours, and they are the (name of another country with ethnic ties to rival college's host city), so, you know, we play them as the (institution's mascot with country tie) versus the (rival's mascot with ties to another country)."

Participant noted that the rally cry is used as a greeting or icebreaker, which among those surveyed was an indicator of broad permeation and effectiveness of the phrase as a unifier.

Researcher: "So, first question, given that definition of a rally cry, does your institution have one that is readily known?"

Participant: "Go (Mascot Name) is very readily known at (institution)."

Researcher: "Yes, I saw, I saw that your trustee signed her note, Go (Mascot Name), so it sounds like that is."

Participant: "We do say that, yep, we say it quite often... Faculty, staff, alumni, current students, you know, other people that are friends at, friends of the program."

The participant added that the rally cry goes beyond the campus, used alumni supporters, community members and others to signal admiration and connection to the institution. The

participant related how strangers often use the rally cry to briefly exchange greetings. The participant also noted that the institution often combines its logo (a single letter, in script; the first letter of the institution's name) with a distinctive background pattern that reflects the ethnic heritage of its host city, which increases awareness.

“As I've been traveling, you know, a good example, I'm wearing (gear with the institution's logo) which is... people can know (institution's logo as single letter) because it's our (background pattern)... And if I'm walking down the street and somebody sees that and they know (institution), they will say, “Go (Name of Mascot)... Whether you're in an airport or walking down the streets of a, you know, a town or something, If you're wearing (institution) gear, it's very likely you will hear Go (Name of Mascot). Even though it's a small school, people know it... I mean, even going through the airport, or, you know, whether it's alumni, friends of... If somebody says Go (Name of Mascot) to you, you say Go (Name of Mascot) back.”

Like every institution surveyed in this research, the participant said the rally cry originated, and is perpetuated, by its athletics program. However, the participant noted that it is used by other departments and functions of the institution outside of athletics.

“People will sign off (in emails) with it, you know, again, just as you're walking down the street, you see somebody goes Go (Name of Mascot)... Our football coach always likes to say, you know, there's nothing better than a good, throaty. thick, Go (Name of Mascot)... He'll end every practice with that. Most of our teams will end practice with the (rally cry).

“You know, I actually would do, like, kick off our faculty, forums the past couple years when I was the athletic director. And you know, I would, alright, this side say go, this

side say (the rally cry), so, you know, even the faculty and staff would get into it. It just kind of is a way to, you know, get the community going and celebrate us as (Mascot Name)s.”

That includes admissions, as well as broader institutional marketing, such as billboards and advertising, the participant said, adding:

“They will do it almost always if we're having, like, an admissions event on campus.. They'll do, you know, have a presentation, give a (rally cry), you know, to the prospective students. So it, it does work its way into that group as well. All adults use it a lot, you know, And all of our alumni use it. And we use it all the time... Our marketing people are constantly trying to kind of see what works best with people, too... They also do use (Rally Cry) quite a bit.”

Participant 5 Reflection

Participant 5 is in senior leadership of the athletics department of a large, major flagship institution known nationally for strong academics and athletics. The institution’s rally cry is “Go Big (Primary Color),” which is also used as an interactive greeting. Participant, who joined the institution last year, described in vivid terms his encounter with the institution’s rally cry on his first day of employment, an indicator of its pervasiveness and how it is ingrained into the culture of the campus and its communities:

Participant: “I was baptized as soon as I touched down in (City of Institution). And it's Go Big (Primary Color), and when I say it's everywhere, it's plastered everywhere. When you're walking around the town, especially on game days, we've got an event going on, you hear somebody scream out, Go Big (Primary Color), and then there's an immediate,

crowd response of, Go Big (Primary Color) right back. So, we use it often, and it's... it's one of those things where, when you come from another institution where it's not as prevalent, and you get here, and you're like, oh my god, everybody, everywhere knows it, And again, we're not the only (Primary Color) school in the state, or in the country, but when you say, or people say, Go Big (Primary Color) they already know what institution you're talking about."

Researcher: "So, that's interesting, so that's... that was day one. You said day one?"

Participant: "That was... that was day one, off the plane. If you've got some kind of (Primary Color) on, and it's an event going on. Again, it's not just a... there's a whole chant behind it, everybody knows it, you walk... again, it's... it can be a non-game day, and I'm walking to the mailbox, and... somebody sees this, and it's a drive down the street, Go Big (Primary Color), and it's a Go Big (Primary Color) right back at them."

Researcher: "And you don't know that person"

Participant: "Don't know him from Adam."

Participant described how the usage and acceptance of the rally cry has gone beyond athletics, permeating into academics and other functions of the institution and long transcending a mere game chant or advertising tagline.

"Everybody uses it. Again, it's on a water tower. You don't know who's athletics, who's not athletics here. It's such a blend of, again, you talk about paraphernalia, you talk about marks, logos, there's no competing market here. And so, this is the only place, within a... 100-mile radius that you've got some institution that's as prevalent as this one. So, you don't know the difference if, if I'm an athletic department administrator, or if I'm a teacher, all of us kind of blend in, and it's one for all..."

“Even in our stadium, it's a multi-use space, so we've got some classrooms held in here. We're in the center of campus, so it's kind of... it's neat to see everything all in one, and everybody... Again, I can walk a block south from the stadium, and it still feels, from a branding, from a marketing, from an understanding who and what we are, it's all interwoven within each other.”

Participant spoke about how wearing gear with the logo and primary color of the institution elicits often spontaneous responses using the rally cry, from friends and strangers alike, both near and away from the institution.

Researcher: “The kind of thing that you just mentioned at your, at your, mailbox, is that, is that something, like, if you were traveling to, say, Chicago or Los Angeles, and somebody, you were wearing, you were wearing, your gear, and they'd (say the rally cry)?”

Participant: “Yes, and it's happened multiple times. It even happened to my dad. My dad got some (institution) gear, and he's down in Memphis, and he said, hey, I got my hat on today, and a couple just passed me, and they, they shoot me a Go Big (Primary Color), and he doesn't know, he doesn't know. So I'm like, yeah, that's the chant, just kind of say Go Big (Primary Color) back. And it was like, oh, I had no idea what was going on, but you put it together, and it happens. More frequently than you would think.”

Participant discussed how university and athletics fundraising at the institution are merging into a single entity – and how the rally cry facilitated such a combination.

Researcher: (Is the rally cry used in) fundraising on the athletic side, or the, university side, or both?

Participant: So, funny you say that, because we are actively merging the two. An athletic fundraising department arm, and we've got a university department arm, and as of next month, they will be, one division.

Researcher: For the obvious reasons, unified and more efficient? What are your motivations on that?

Participant: Hard to separate it in the minds of people that feel like the university and athletics are the same thing... So, some of those donor bases and the objectives are to have the same goals, so instead of stepping over each other, the idea was to combine efforts and strategically attack them both at once.

Researcher: So, your rally cry will probably be a part of all of that on both sides of the house, right?

Participant: Yep.

Participant also reflected on the pervasiveness of the rally cry as a greeting, describing it as “I acknowledge you, you acknowledge me, we're on the same team,” Participant added:

“It's just not one of these things you have to remember to do. It's not forced, and it's natural... You know, my daughter.. she's 6. So, she comes here, experiences the game, Next day after a game, she's going down the street telling people. Go Big (Primary Color)! And then they respond, Go Big (Primary Color)! And I didn't teach it to her... I didn't tell her how to do it, what to do, and it just became a thing.

“It's one of those things you really need to experience. And so, I would love for you to come up here and experience it yourself, kind of immerse yourself into it, because it's, it's unreal. It's not like it's fabricated, or it's a facade, it's a real thing. People really care

about the (institution's) community. I didn't really understand the magnitude of what (the institution's spirit) was and is until I actually came here."

Participant 6 Reflection

Participant 6 is in leadership of marketing and communications at a large, major midwestern institution that serves as the flagship of its state. Its rally cry, which has transcended traditional marketing and gone beyond athletics, is somewhat unique, and very much interactive, as it involves the spelling out the individual letters of the name of its state in equal measures by the person extended the greeting and the person receiving the greeting. Participant reflected that the combination of the uniqueness of the rally cry, plus its elaborate and interactive accompanying gestures, has enabled its spread and usage far beyond its athletic origins of almost a century ago:

"The (spelling out of the letters) is a call-and-repeat style. So, someone would (start), and then someone would finish the spelling... That is a bit broader than athletics. It's used in an athletics context, but it's more broadly used just institutionally, so you wouldn't necessarily do it in a fan environment. So, you'd be walking to an airport, you'd have some (institution) swag on ... and somebody would just randomly shout out (first letters), and you would respond with (last letters). It's universal for (the institution)."

Participant noted that the institution's status as the state's flagship institution makes identification with the institution synonymous with identification with the state, adding:

"I will say, though, because (the institution is) unique in that it's the both the flagship and the land grant in the state, it's transcended (the institution) in some instances... (The

institution) really leaned into (representing the entire state) but again, because they're the flagship, they can sort of own the state (where institution is), versus sharing it."

Participant said the institution also uses "Go (Name of Mascot)" as a rally cry, but that it is "more associated with a sporting event," adding:

"You wouldn't necessarily hear Go (Name of Mascot) as ubiquitous as you would (rally cry spelling out letters) outside of a sporting venue. So, if I compared the two, I'd say one is more broad, academic and athletic, somewhat statewide aperture, where the Go (Mascot Name) is typically associated with a sporting event..."

Participant cited as the rally cry's origin the institution's Alma Mater song, which was composed in 1903 by a student and traditionally sung at football games (however, others also have linked it to a cheer and song that was introduced in 1947), saying, "There's a tradition where the team goes to the sideline where the student section is and they all stand together and sing (the alma mater)." Participant continued:

"There's also hand gestures that go along with it... It's also a known tradition to spell it out using your arms, kind of like you would in the you know, the YMCA song (by the Village People, 1978)... The call-and-repeat into something, you know, we physically do with our you know, with our bodies, and as a prompt to a song... So you stand together singing it, and then everybody breaks apart and does the spelling... Again, sort of ingrained in that... that's tribal, communal experience."

The rally cry, given the visual appeal of the accompanying gestures, makes its way into admissions and overall marketing, as well as pages on the institution's website describing traditions of the university, the participant said, adding:

“Yeah, absolutely, and we did, we do our admission materials maybe every two to three years, and the last round, we actually put together, like, a whole, heritage sort of section, like tradition, what you were mentioning, kind of section, like what does (it) mean? ... We included in the recruitment piece, so that as a prospective student looking to come to (institution), they start to get a flavor of some of the traditions and, you know, spirit stuff. So, absolutely, we include that in the admission materials. And even... even on merchandise, you know, we have a pretty robust affinity and merchandise program.”

Participant described the rally cry as “really a pride point. It's a way to express their pride point. Like I said in our communication with others, it's a way for strangers to call out each other if they sense that I am... I am... hey, you're wearing the gear, I'm wearing the gear, it's a way for me to engage.” Participant elaborated that it is among the institution’s merchandise assets and included routinely in signage and billboards.

Finally, participant credited the institution’s continued and concerted efforts to teach its traditions, including the rally cry, as key to its perpetuation.

“We switched up our convocation this year. Up until this year, it was a pretty traditional convocation. With, you know, speakers and... I'll just say more traditional. This year, it was switched up to be more student-focused, and focused more on, sort of an experience, and so it was... intended to be introducing and ingraining some of these traditions. So even if the University Convocation has switched to teaching the incoming students, the words (of the alma mater), and how to do (the gestures), and how to do the call-and-repeat. So, it's now become part of the convocation. So that also kind of crosses over to the academic side.”

Participant 7 Reflection

Participant 7 related unique challenges and opportunities in the institution's efforts to use its rally cry to create and perpetuate a shared culture and identity. The institution, founded as a standalone entity less than 60 years ago, began as a professional school for the flagship university in the state. Its rally cry is "Go, (Name of Mascot)." The participant's institution was unique among the institutions surveyed in two substantial ways: 1) The institution's relative youth; and 2) The challenges it is facing in establishing its own unique identity and permeating culture within a city that vividly and vocally embraces the state's flagship university (located in another city), strong in academics and athletics, that has a formidable and permeating rally cry that is synonymous with the state. Also unique: There is another major public university in the state, also with strong academics and athletics, that also has a pervasive rally cry.

"Yeah, so we do have a rally cry. I don't think it's, as strong as, I would say (the rally cry of the flagship). I was just at the board meeting this morning, and we, you know, we share the same board, board of trustees. Right. So interesting to hear, their student, representation, their president, all speak... But after every speech, they are saying (the rally cry of the flagship). You know, it has nothing to do with athletics, of course, but it's just... it was fascinating to me. Again, in comparison, because of where I sit,, I watch a lot of, you know, the culture at (state flagship). I would say it is that embedded. We're a younger university. We're only 56 years old, and so I think that plays into it a little bit. We've had a kind of, like, a rotation of mascots, in our early years, so, we're young."

Participant, however, expressed hopes that, as the institution distances itself more from its origin as the flagship's professional school, and attracts and matriculates more undergraduates, tactics like its rally cry will begin to make a bigger difference. The hand gesture,

designed to accompany expressing the rally cry, is done by positioning fingers in a way that represents the mascot, the participant said, adding that the institution has made a priority efforts to teach their culture, rally cry and gesture:

“I think what you're seeing is a young university in the making, with traditions in the making. And, this is definitely... a slogan is part of tradition. To me, a slogan teaches people what community you're a part of. It signifies tribe, right? Like, you know, your tribe. And I think that is something that has to be taught. And I think we have to teach it a little bit harder, because we're younger, we're a younger university with less tradition. And, we're not, we're not, like, mired in athletics the way other large publics are, if that makes sense...”

“Students are very much taught that in, you know, coming in, and you see that permeate our student culture, athletics. 100%, more so with athletics, less, you know, with academics, but administrators like myself, I like to end with (the rally cry), exclamation point, so, it's kind of part of the culture...”

“It's used as a sign-off at any kind of formal communication touchpoint, whether it's like orientation, whether it's graduation, these kind of hallmark moments in a student's life cycle.”

But the rally cry does not engender the same visceral reactions than the expressions representing other public institutions in the state, the participant said:

Researcher: “If you and I were approaching each other in the airport, and we didn't know each other, and we're wearing (institution) gear, would I do the hand signal and Go (Name of Mascot)? Would I do the hand signal?”

Participant: "I think the hand signal was introduced about five years ago, so I have no idea if people actually do that. I see that represented in a lot of the photography we do with students... When I'm in the grocery store on the weekend and somebody, you know, has a (flagship) shirt, strangers will say, (flagship's rally cry)... In all honesty, it's hard to squeeze in an extra team when you're in (this) state, when people are either cheering for (flagship) or (other public institution), right? ... I don't think that people are invested in our athletics the way these other universities that have those slogans, those larger universities... But every once in a blue moon, yes, I will have somebody, if I have a shirt on, see me and say, Go (Name of Mascot) in the airport, that's happened. So, but not as much as, you know, (other state rally cries)."

While the institution's rally cry is rooted in athletics, the participant said, it is perhaps more of an identifying trait of all undergraduates, and it is used often in undergraduate recruitment materials. The participant said, however, it is not as prevalent among faculty and the institution's graduate students and research faculty, many of which are in the health professions.

Participant: "I think it's focused more on students, frankly, than faculty, but I think generally faculty are not into the football, or the sports, or athletics. As much as our students, and so I feel like they don't say that as much. But, you know, I'm not attuned to every moment in everybody's lives, so it's hard for me to know. But I definitely see it with students more so than faculty."

Researcher: "Faculty, if they use it, it would be... How would faculty use it?"

Participant: "In those moments when you know you need to kind of rally the troops, when you're saying something about, hey, class is gonna get out early today because I know we

got a football game. Go (Name of Mascot), I could see that, you know. I taught in the past, so I think I've... I've done that before. Okay. Yeah."

Researcher: "What about admissions materials? Yes. Does it show up in that?"

Participant: "Yes, very much so."

Researcher: "The gesture, does the gesture show up in, admissions material?"

Participant: "You know, we just created an icon for that gesture this past year, so it is starting... we've made some stickers, it's very popular. We have shifted our admissions material to actually highlight our mascot ... this year, because we have gotten direct feedback from focus groups and, our admission recruiters, that (the mascot) goes over really well. (It) is really popular among first-time enrolling freshmen. Now, of course, we wouldn't use (mascot) for reaching out to, say, more non-traditional students, adult learners, you know, trying to convince them to do online courses or even graduate programs. We probably wouldn't see that there. You see less ... when you get into the health system, because we're an academic medical center. They... would never use (mascot) in any kind of email communication sign-off from any of our senior leadership."

Researcher: "Really undergraduate, really focused on incoming students."

Participant: "Very undergraduate, focused. And it's not from the lack of trying (to expand)."

Over time, the participant said, it has been easier for the institution to introduce its rally cry, colors and traditions throughout its different communities. The participant said progress comes as more undergraduates and graduates see the materials and soak them in as identity.

Participant: "Five or six years ago was the first time we had some really consistent banners across campus, and we put Go (Name of Mascot) next to the university logo on

the adjacent banner. So, again, a form of teaching, I mean, you know, signage is a way to teach people, you know, who they are, and what to say, and how they, you know, what community they're a part of. So, the light pole banners was a big piece in that education, frankly.”

Researcher: “So your origin story is really... is being written?”

Participant: “Yes, very much so, yeah. It's been written, but we're... now we're trying to evolve it and grow it, but it is really... our origin story is one of separating from, you know, the flagship.”

Researcher: “It's really, you got to age out of it?”

Participant: “Yes. Correct, correct, yeah. And like I said, Blaze was really, you know, it was kind of mid-90s, you know, is when, again, it's a young mascot. And our colors are young, our identity is young. But I think rally cries are important. It's a mantra, right?”

Researcher: “And now you're trying to plan it securely?”

Participant: “That's right, that's right.”

The five “A”s of Effective Rally Cries

The data clearly indicated that the most effective rally cries among the institutions of the seven participants have found resonance in what the researcher describes as The Five “A”s: Athletics, Academics, Administration, Alumni and Advancement. Table 13 indicates which rally cries at the seven institutions achieved such saturation in those areas.

Table 13
The five “A”s of Effective Rally Cries

| Participant | Athletics | Academics | Administration | Alumni | Advancement |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Somewhat | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 2 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 3 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 4 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 5 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 6 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 7 | Somewhat | Somewhat | Yes | Somewhat | Yes |

The rally cries of five of the seven institutions (2 through 6) showed saturation within Five “A”s, based upon the participant interviews, which indicates widespread usage and acceptance by the campus community. However, the institutions of Participant 1 and Participant 7 did not have saturation within all of the Five “A”s, but each for different reasons. Participant 1 reported that the institution has a relatively low-key athletics culture, which is typically the launching pad for rally cries and that the academic community is cool to its usage. Participant 7 reported that its rally cry is gaining popularity with its undergraduate population and recent graduates but does not have strong resonance with its students in its professional and graduate programs, which is the institution’s mainstay. Further, the institution’s origin as a professional school for the state’s flagship means many of its older alumni identify with the flagship rather than the relatively young and broader institution that sprang from the school. Further, the institution briefly abandoned parts of its athletics program, causing a disruption in the traditional base of a rally cry, and its researchers and graduate school professors are also cool to the cry.

Insights on Themes

Conclusions drawn from the data collection provide these insights to the three predominant and shared themes on the importance, reach and success of rally cries at their institution:

- **Theme No. 1: Creating Community:** The participants from the seven participating institutions can trace the origins of their rally cries from athletics, which tracks anecdotally with the need to inspire and motivate the players and fans of teams. The strongest and most enthusiastic responses about the impact of rally cries among our participants come from institutions with traditions of strong athletics program, which in turn generates fan support, positive responses from constituent communities such as alumni and out-of-market attention. Rally cries become a way for members of those community to identify with the institution – and one another. Institutions in this survey who have enjoyed the greatest success with their rally cry have connected it in somewhat – either through color, logo or connection to mascot – in the creation and application of branded apparel and gear; the display, size and frequency of branding; and the continuous reinforcement through consistent usage by senior administrators and inclusion, even saturation, in communications and advertising. It is apparent also that success in athletics has a direct correlation to success of a rally cry, even for those institutions that have integrated them into academics and alumni operations. Five of the seven participants report that their rally cries that have successfully transcended athletics and have been embraced by other university entities, particularly academics. Punching through athletics wall and allowing a rally cry to rally more than players and fans on the fields and in the stands was a benefit to all

seven of the institutions surveyed at varying degrees, with some reporting great satisfaction when it is adopted and used to signal the progress of its faculty and students. Use of the rally cry in the communications by senior administrators sends a powerful signal that it is valued and respected by leadership. Affixing the rally cry into names of programs, activities and words also helps create greater acceptance by the entire campus. Several institutions also spoke about how the rally cry is used by those beyond the campus to signal their support of the institution, such as community members, sponsoring businesses and supporting agencies. In one case where use of the rally cry was not reported to be as widespread as others in the survey, Participant 1 said ownership and usage of the institution's rally cry was mostly with alumni and not as prevalent among faculty, staff and enrolled students. However, Participant 1 said the administration of the institution, hoping to create a greater sense of campus community, persists in using the rally cry in public communications. In contrast, Participant 4 said the rally cry usage confirms a bond between the institution and the city is extremely strong, as both draw elements of their identifies from each other. As such, the expression of its rally cry, "Go (Mascot Name)," has become a way to signal support for both the institution and the city. Finally, at two of the surveyed institutions, the use of the rally cry and gesture occasionally is offered as recognition of those living or from the state where the institution is located rather than just a sign of affiliation to the institution.

- **Theme No. 2: Deeper Meaning:** The most successful rally cries among the surveyed institutions appear to be those that have become interactive and responsive, such as a responsive greeting or show of affection through deliberate and recognized gestures

that connect to the slogan. This is not by accident, as several participating institutions confirm, and often requires deliberate and intentional acts by the university to teach newcomers the meaning, need and value for such tribal interactions and creating digital assets, such as web pages and videos, describe and illustrate these rituals. One institution that was surveyed (Participant 6), which is longing to create a stronger culture, recognizes that teaching tradition and using the rally cry is the long game in becoming successful and has made changes to reflect that priority. Participant 5 said that the participant's institution occupies a special, and perhaps enviable to its peers and rivals, position of visibility and pride among the citizens of its state; its rally cry, "Go Big (Primary Color)," has transcended traditional marketing and branding and expanded beyond athletics, becoming a greeting among friends and strangers, both in the state and anywhere that gear-wearing supporters might spot one another, and a way to signal success in academics, enrollment and other aspects of the institution and demonstrate alumni pride. In the case of Participant 7, while athletics were added to the mix about 50 years ago, continuation of those programs were called into question about 10 years ago when its governing board discontinued, then reinstated, them. Further, the institution is still known and respected for its medical teaching and research, which means a sizable part of its campus and community lack the affinity for athletics-based spirit given the focus of their studies and work. Nevertheless, Participant 7's institution has identified its rally cry – "Go, (Name of Mascot)" – to build greater community and recently coupled it with a hand gesture that is catching on as a form of greeting. All the institutions in the survey trace its origin from athletics and is fueled by the institution's success in competition.

- **Theme No. 3: Asset of the Institution:** Successful rally cries also have proven to be valuable assets for the institution, becoming tools of marketing and branding, fundraising and development and revenue generation. In these best-case scenarios, the rally cries that have crossed over beyond athletics and become identifiable and advantageous to all facets of the operation. One spoke glowingly about the benefit of registering its institution's rally cry as a registered trademark – and actively enforcing its rights and usage to drive revenue through merchandise sales and sponsorship rights. Many say the development and saturation of an effective rally cry is a viable tool in its admissions and overall marketing and branding.

Insights to Research Questions

Conclusions drawn from the data collection provide these insights to the research questions:

- **Question No. 1:** Does the institution have a rally cry that is readily known?
 - All seven institutions trace the origins of their rally cries from athletics and that it is used both on- and off-campus. The most successful rally cries among the surveyed institutions appear to be those that have become interactive and responsive, such as a greeting or show of affection. All the rally cries surveyed were simple, easy to convey and clear in meaning and intent; six of the seven institutions incorporated the “Go” or “Big” combined with Mascot Name or Primary Color. All seven rally cries were easy to remember, with all but one in a cadence between two and four words.
- **Question No. 2:** Does the rally cry have an origin story (how it came into existence)?

- All seven institutions trace the origins of their rally cries from athletics, but all but one of the respondents could trace its precise origin story. Six of the seven institutions incorporated the “Go” or “Big” combined with its Mascot Name or Primary Color.
- **Question No. 3:** To what extent are recognizable rally cries embraced in areas beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?
 - Five of the seven participants report that their rally cries that have successfully transcended athletics and have been embraced by other university entities, particularly academics, and adopted by individuals without direct ties to the institution. The most successful rally cries among the surveyed institutions appear to be those that have become interactive and responsive, such as a greeting or show of affection. This requires deliberate and intentional acts by the university to teach newcomers the meaning, need and value for such tribal interactions. The value of the rally cries surveyed came from how they are used, how often they are used and what distinguishing attributes, actual or inspirational, that the institution, including its employees and supporters, puts forward as its definition.
 - Successful rally cries also have proven to be valuable assets for the institution, becoming tools of marketing and branding, fundraising and development and revenue generation. In these best-case scenarios, the rally cries that have crossed over beyond athletics and become identifiable to all facets of the operation.
- **Question No. 4:** In what ways, if any, is the institution’ rally cry used to build community?

- The strongest and most enthusiastic responses about the impact of rally cries among our participants come from institutions with traditions of strong athletics program, which in turn generates fan support, positive responses from constituent communities such as alumni and out-of-market attention.
- Punching through athletics wall and allowing a rally cry to rally more than players and fans on the field has been a benefit to all seven of the institutions surveyed at varying degrees, with some reporting great satisfaction when it is adopted and used to signal the progress of its faculty and students.
- The use of the rally cry and, when available, corresponding gestures, occasionally is offered as recognition of those living or from the state where the institution is located rather than just a sign of affiliation to the institution.
- The most successful rally cries among the surveyed institutions appear to be those that have become interactive and responsive, such as a greeting or show of affection. This requires deliberate and intentional acts by the university to teach newcomers the meaning, need and value for such tribal interactions.

Reflections About Findings

Implications For Practice

Examination of the usage and outcomes recording using rally cries at the surveyed institutions produced these suggested takeaways of tools and tactics for universities hoping to create, capitalize or magnify a rally cry as an effective branding tool

- **Simplicity of message.** The most effective rally cries in the survey were simple, with six of the seven surveyed institutions simply using a variation of either “Go” with its

- Primary Color or Mascot Name. Given the common lineage of athletics in all seven of the origin stories of the rally cries, a cheer or shout as the rally cry has proven effective for many institutions. However, as the research outside of the survey indicates, not all effective rally cries must also be crowd chants (as “Duty, Honor, Country,” used by the U.S. Military Academy, illustrates); those that have been effective simply function as a way to deliver a simple message or a vessel that the institution can use to fill with its own meaning (as “Hotty Toddy,” used by the University of Mississippi, illustrates). Also, the fewer words, the better: All seven cries examined in this study had no more than three words and all are relatively easy to speak and can be expressed succinctly in written form (taking little space).
- **Embrace and Use Beyond Athletics.** Participants from the five institutions with the most successful rally cries could point to multiple usage of its rally cries beyond athletics and by Academics, Administration, Alumni and Advancement. This sets the tone for others in the leadership to follow, which, in turn, makes more likely that it will also be adopted and used by others. Some with strong rally cries report that it is a modifier of special events, activities, awards and other visible projects and outreach. Ensuring connection to athletics, the origin point of all seven rally cries studied in the survey, is also critical to its staying power. However, the most effective examples in both the study and the research are rally cries that are used, displayed, featured, repeated and reinforced in special events, activities and communications by academics, alumni, development, student government and student activities (e.g., incorporated into homecoming activities, special events and Greek life).

- **Saturation Marketing.** Participants reporting the greatest resonance of their rally cries say that their rally cries can be found almost everywhere: Signage, banners, murals, advertising, admissions materials, light-post banners, stickers, email signatures, printed materials, electronic signage and more. This multiple and multi-platform approach mirrors that taken at Middle Tennessee State University, where its hybrid rally cry and slogan, “I am True Blue,” is present, in some form or fashion, in almost every marketing and branding outreach put forward by the university, including being affixed to the playing surfaces or fields of each of its major sports facilities and on light-post banners in front of every academic structure. Consistency and persistence create momentum akin to the power of compound interest; lack of consistency, as one of the surveyed institutions discovered, derails momentum.
- **Creating a Personal Connection.** The most successful rally cries in the survey also have an associated verbal or physical gesture, reaction or response that lines up with the slogan. They also have created, continued and reinforced reaction or response to alumni and/or supporters in reaction or response to seeing someone wearing logo gear. Rally cries reach maximum potential when their expression becomes greater than showing pride in an athletics team or accomplishment and becomes a way to identify and magnify success and pride throughout the institution.
- **Rally Cries as Revenue Opportunities.** The most effective rally cries in the survey have become a tool for revenue generation and donor support through merchandise licensing and fundraising campaigning. One of the surveyed institutions is enjoying strong sponsorship revenue through the careful sale and diligent monitoring of the use of its rally cry. Others are using the rally cry as a targeting tool for undergraduate and

new freshman recruitment (some even for certain demographics within the undergraduate pool).

- **Teach Your Children (and Employees) Well:** The most successful institutions surveyed invest in regular and intentional training new freshmen and transfers, as well as employees, about their institution's traditions, including rally cries. Several of those surveyed report they organize meetings or events that teach students about origin stories; what cheers and chants mean and when they should be said; and how to properly express school spirit. Several have built dedicated and detailed webpages that provide written and visual information and cues about their rally cries.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study has only scratched the surface of this topic. Future research could explore a myriad of elements, including:

- **Saturation of rally cry** in marketing, branding and communications and whether frequent and persistent exposure through these tools as contributed to the success or failure of these slogans to reach or sustain acceptance.
- **Budgetary resources** restraints and how spending in marketing, branding and strategic communications plays a role in the development and perpetuation of a rally cry.
- **Athletics program success** and how a culture and tradition of excellence in athletics competition makes it easier or harder for rally cries to be created and sustained.
- **Existence of a unified institutional culture** in use of a rally cry, particularly between academics and athletics, and whether institutions with successful rally cries have permeated into all aspects of campus life and service.

- **Intrastate competition** and whether the number of public and private institutions within a state, district or area make it difficult to achieve market saturation and resonance of a rally cry throughout the communities.
- **Town-and-gown relationships** and whether institutions with strong rally cries have strong symmetry, demonstrated donor support and a supportive partnership-driven relationship between the political and institutional leadership.

Limitations and Delimitations

In pursuing solutions to queries for this study, certain delimitations were evident in the construction of the investigation. This study was dependent upon responses from the administrators of institutions included in the Princeton Review. The sample size contained only seven participating administrators. More were contacted than those who agreed to participate. And, preferably, there would have been more participants to develop a wider scope of insights. Given the demanding nature of the roles of these administrators, it was difficult to find potential participants that were available to dedicate time to this study. A broader sample size from other institutions could have yielded different results. Further, it is not known whether the administrators who declined to respond to requests for participation did so because their institution did not have a rally cry, which may have deprived the study from understanding the potential impacts upon institutions without such slogans. Also, the study also did not consider differences between male and female administrators, which could have provided valuable insights. These delimitations could make the outcomes of this study less able to be generalized.

Concluding Reflections and Summation

Participants provided powerful insights into their perspectives on the origins, effectiveness, reach and value of rally cries at their institution. The interview process suggests

that these institutions recognize the importance and benefits of a rally cry. However, the effectiveness and value that these cries represent are not consistent. It is clear from the reflections of the participants that the rally cries with the greatest success are those with broad acceptance and application throughout the entire institution; have engendered support and acceptance from outside the campus; originate and are rooted in athletics at some level but have expanded in ways to express overall pride in the progress and success of the entire institution; and have tangible and identifiable value to the institution in terms of benefits for admissions, use in overall marketing and branding and revenue generation through donor endearment and merchandising sales and licensing. Further, those that have evolved and matured into forms of endearment and greetings among affinity groups appear to be the most effective and enduring.

Three of the cases, the institutions of Participant 3, 5 and 6, all of which are, perhaps not coincidentally, all dominant public flagships in their state with national brands for strong athletics, enjoy the greatest resonance of their rally cries beyond athletics – and perhaps beyond the institutions themselves and into their home states. However, the case of Participant 4, who hails from a relatively tiny private school that competes at the lowest tier of NCAA division competition, has shown that rally cries can build community, particularly town and gown relationships, without being a flagship or touting academic dominance and going all in. Meanwhile, the administration at the institution of Participant 1 clings to its cry to help build community but has been hampered by the lack of resonance in its internal campus community.

Finally, consider the similarities and differences between the cases of Participant 2 and Participant 7. Neither of their institutions are their state's flagship and both have considerable competition for attention and market share in their states. Both created a rally cry and interactive components tied to their rally cry to provide greater distinction and identity. Where they separate

is in two significant ways: 1) Participant 2's institution has a strong athletics tradition that often stands up as a foil and competitive rival to the state's flagship, which has become part of its identity within the state; Participant 7's institution, a relatively young university, as struggled to establish and maintain an athletics identity or tradition throughout its athletics portfolio, which places it at a disadvantage in capturing fan loyalty through its rally cry against not only the state's flagship but other institutions in the state; and 2) Participant 2's institution has made considerable strategic investments in brand saturation and incorporated its rally cry and interactive responses as an identity marker beyond athletics, while Participant 7's institution has only recently recognized the value of its rally cry as a way to build culture of the entire university (notably, with academics and athletics on equal footing) and, as such, is investing in teaching tradition and the beginnings of a saturation strategy to delineate it from its in-state rivals, hopefully someday reaching what Participant 2's institution has found.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Guidance and organization of qualitative interviews (Krahenbuhl, 2024).

- **Rapport Building:** Create an environment that is comfortable and promotes honesty and trust. Restrict judgmental thoughts.
- **Listen Actively:** Listen carefully throughout the entire interview avoiding interruptions.
- **Exhibit Flexibility:** Prepare in advance to adapt as necessary.
- **Record the Interview:** Plan to record interviews to accurately collect the data.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Prepare and safeguard participants' anonymity.

Introduction and consent

I am completing this interview using a protocol created for my dissertation topic. This interview is part of an ongoing study to identify rally cries at select higher education institutions that may have achieved a degree of permanence and recognition for said entities.

Thank you for agreeing to conduct the interview on the Zoom platform. I am going to record our interview. A reminder that I am anonymizing what goes into the paper from our discussion, so that it obscures:

- The name, gender and title of the participant
- The name and location of the participant's institution (it is, however, referenced in broad geographic terms)
- Identifying factors of the rally cry of the participant's institution (colors, mascot, specific names)
- The colors and mascot of the participant's institution
- References about other institutions that might identify the participant's institution or location

I will ensure that your identity is kept confidential in anything written throughout this document.

Participant's consent

Do I have your permission to record the interview?

- If No: Thank you for your time, but since I am unable to record your interview, I will have to move on to the next participant.
- If Yes: (proceed to the questions)

As we go throughout the interview, I am going to follow a list of questions but may ask a few follow-up questions, request examples, and so forth. If at any time during this interview, you do not wish to continue let me know and we will stop.

Interview Questions

- Does your institution have a rally cry that is readily known?
 - How is it used internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)?
 - How is it used externally (In the community)?
- If yes, do you know the origin story of your rally cry (how it came into existence)?
- To what extent is your rally cry embraced in other areas of the university beyond athletics, such as academics, admissions, alumni outreach and fundraising?
 - Internally (Faculty/Staff, Students, Administration)
 - Externally (In the community)
- In what ways, if any, is your rally cry used to build community?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your perspectives on this issue with me. Please do not hesitate to reach out and follow up with any questions at my email, Andrew.Oppmann@mtsu.edu, and thank you again for your time.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear (name of potential participant),

Hope all is well at (name of institution)! I am writing to ask for your input for a study I am conducting to identify rally cries at higher education institutions that may have achieved a degree of permanence and recognition for said entities (examples include Roll Tide from the University of Alabama and War Eagle from Auburn University). This is the final project for my doctorate, so your help would be very much appreciated

I am asking you to complete a one-time survey, which would be conducted via Zoom or Teams. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, I will send you an email on our informed consent process, where you review the purpose of the study, a description of the procedures to be followed, the approximate duration of the study, the compensation, what happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation, PI contact information, and reinforce the confidentiality of the study. Affirmation only requires a reply to the process email with the word YES.

Participants will have a private interview conducted on a Zoom platform. These interviews will be semi-structured, private and will last no more than hour (20-30 minutes is my target). They will be recorded with participant consent. The PI will give an introduction to the study. In the introduction, the PI will ask for permission to record the audio of the interview. If the participant agrees, then the PI will proceed with the prepared interview questions. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Data will be reported in a manner to ensure responses are not identifiable to the participant or their institution.

Your responses will be studied to provide context on how those words are being used and how effective they are in building community. The study will also attempt find any potential common threads between those slogans that have achieved greater acceptance and permanence.

IRB Details:

- Study Title: Existence and Effect of Rally Cries Upon Select Higher Education Institutions Listed in the Princeton Review
- Protocol Number: IRB-FY2025-267
- Approval Date: July 10, 2025
- Principal Investigator: Andrew Oppmann
- Institution: Middle Tennessee State University
- Target Population: At least six (6) marketing executives and/or administrators at select institutions on The Princeton Review list of the nation's top colleges and universities

Risks and Benefits:

The potential risks are minimal as no identifiable data will be shared. I do not anticipate any discomfort, inconvenience, or risk to you as a result of participation other than the giving a short amount of your time.

Contact Information:

Andrew Oppmann
Vice President, Marketing and Communications, Middle Tennessee State University
Principal Investigator for this Research Project
Andrew.Oppmann@mtsu.edu
Office: 615-494-7800

For additional information about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at irb_information@mtsu.edu (<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

If you are willing to participate, please contact me by replying to this email and I will work with you to find a time for us to talk.

Thank you for your consideration,
Andrew Oppmann

Appendix C: Debriefing Protocol

Each of the participants received this email, along with a transcript of their interview. This was done to give them an opportunity to review the data collected and provide quick feedback to the researcher.

Dear (First Name of Participant),

Attached is a transcription of our call (it is still somewhat rough in spots, which I will smooth out as appropriate if those thoughts make the final draft). If you see anything that needs to be addressed, please let me know as soon as possible. A reminder that I am anonymizing what goes into the paper from our discussion, so that it obscures:

- The name, gender and title of the participant
- The name and location of the participant's institution (it is, however, referenced in broad geographic terms)
- Identifying factors of the rally cry of the participant's institution (colors, mascot, specific names)
- The colors and mascot of the participant's institution
- References about other institutions that might identify the participant's institution or location

Thanks again! I enjoyed our discussion.

Take care,
Andrew

The researcher will send this email, along with the final abstract, at the end of the study.

Dear (first name of participant),

Thank you again you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to support my research study. As a reminder, the purpose of my study was to identify rally cries at select higher education institutions that may have achieved a degree of permanence and recognition for said entities. Attached is a copy of the abstract of the study.

If you have questions or concerns about this qualitative research study, please contact Andrew Oppmann at Andrew.Oppmann@mtsu.edu or Dr. Jim Rost at Jim.Rost@mtsu.edu.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at irb_information@mtsu.edu. (<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

Take care,
Andrew

APPENDIX D: Examples of Participant 1 Artifacts



AI Mode All Images Videos News More ▾



[Redacted]

"Go [Redacted] Go" is a popular cheer primarily associated with the [Redacted] athletic teams. The phrase is also used by other [Redacted] related groups and events in the state. [↗](#)

University of [Redacted] Athletics

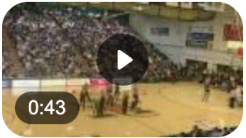
The [Redacted] nickname was adopted in a student vote in 1926, [Redacted] legendary [Redacted] once found in the [Redacted] Mountains. Fans, including [Redacted] official social media channels and various sports teams, frequently use "Go [Redacted] Go" to show support. [↗](#)

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

University [redacted] Athletics
 [redacted] news > general-a-letter-to-cat...
A Letter to [redacted] Country from [redacted]
 Apr 13, 2020 — Go [redacted] Go! [redacted]. Director of Athletics ... [redacted]
 Country. [redacted] Logo. Copyright © ...

Facebook · [redacted]
 8 reactions · 6 days ago
Go [redacted] go!!! 🍀🍀
 An incredible night celebrating hall of fame inductees and award winners with the [redacted] Association of Broadcasters!
 Missing: university | Show results with: university

Facebook · [redacted]
 10+ reactions · 4 years ago
Just about a year ago - GO [redacted] GO @ [redacted] Dance ...

 Just about a year ago - GO [redacted] GO @ [redacted] [redacted]
 [redacted] 16 · 1. Last viewed on: Nov 21, 2025 ...

X · [redacted]
 10+ likes · 1 week ago
GO, [redacted] GO!!!
 [redacted] profile. [redacted] Men's
 Soccer profile. [redacted] Men's Soccer. [redacted]

GO [redacted] GO - ONE COLOR

The primary wordmark can be used in the color variations shown below.



APPENDIX E: Examples of Participant 2 Artifacts

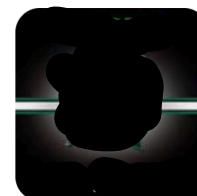


go [redacted] go [redacted]


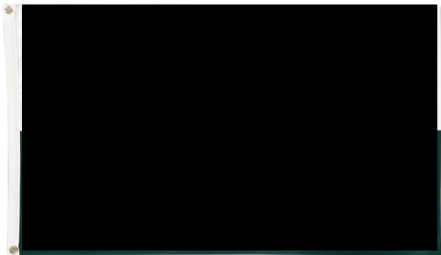
AI Mode All Images Videos News Shopping Short videos More Tools

AI Overview

"Go [redacted], go [redacted]" is a famous chant and tradition for [redacted], where fans yell "Go [redacted]!" and then respond to the same cheer with "Go [redacted]!". This chant is a way for fans to show pride and is often used during sporting events, especially football games. The colors [redacted] are the official colors of [redacted], and the phrase is associated with the school's identity. [🔗](#)



- **The chant:** The chant is a back-and-forth call-and-response, with fans shouting "Go [redacted]" and others responding with "Go [redacted]". [🔗](#)
- **School spirit:** It is a common way for [redacted] fans to express their pride and support for the university's athletic teams. [🔗](#)
- **[redacted] official colors:** "Go [redacted]" and "Go [redacted]" directly reference the university's official colors. [🔗](#)

[redacted] Go
[redacted] Go [redacted] Flag - 3' x 5'

SKU: US-430

[f](#) [p](#) [x](#) [m](#)

Price: **\$40.99 USD**

Quantity:

Add to cart



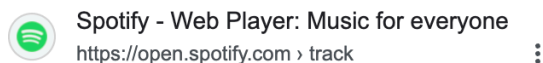
Why "GO [redacted], GO [redacted]" Is More Than Just A Cheer

Sep 5, 2016 — "Go [redacted] Go [redacted]" is such a part of the [redacted] community that we say it involuntarily. It's a phrase that identifies us as part of a very special ...



Explain why people keep shouting "Go [redacted]" and ...

Often chanted during sporting events and a way of showing school pride. Go [redacted] = [redacted]
[redacted]...respond with Go [redacted] Go [redacted]



Go [redacted] Go [redacted], Go [redacted]

Listen to Go [redacted] Go [redacted] Go [redacted] on Spotify. Song [redacted] 2021.



'Go [redacted] Go [redacted]' proper protocol

About once every couple of months I will get a random 'Go [redacted]' shouted to me in public. I always try to find the person who said it, make eye contact, reply ' ...



Go [redacted] Go [redacted] tradition at [redacted]



[redacted]
[redacted] ...

APPENDIX F: Examples of Participant 3 Artifacts



go big [redacted] chant

AI Mode All Videos Images News Short videos Shopping More Tools

AI Overview

The "Go Big [redacted]" chant is a simple, synchronized chant used by the [redacted] sports teams and fans. Fans will call out "Go Big [redacted]" to show support for their [redacted] often heard at away games. It is a key tradition of the "Big [redacted] Nation," the fan base of [redacted] athletics.

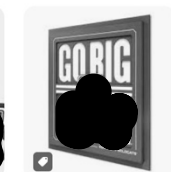
- **How it works:** During a game, a group of fans will start by yelling "Go!" and then a larger group responds with "Big [redacted]" in a synchronized way.
- **When it's used:** It is used to cheer on various [redacted] teams, but is most famously associated with the men's and women's basketball programs.
- **Why it's significant:** The chant has become a well-known part of the "Big [redacted] Nation" and is used both at home and on the road, demonstrating the large and dedicated fan base of [redacted] athletic programs.



Search results for 'Go Big' [redacted]



Facebook Go Big [redacted]



[redacted]



Wallpapers.com [redacted]



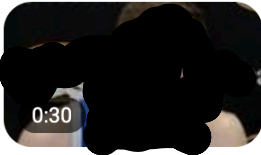
eBay - In stock Kentucky Wildcats BIG BLUE NATI...



Kentucky Branded - I... Big Blue Boxy Chenil...

Instagram · [redacted]
2.7K+ likes · 8 months ago

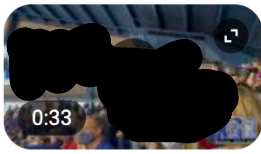
We sure do love a road Go Big [redacted] chant



2691 likes, 25 comments · [redacted] on March 8, 2025: "We sure do love a road Go Big [redacted] chant".

YouTube · [redacted]
8.1K+ views · 3 years ago

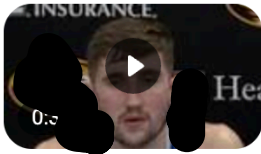
[redacted] fans take over [redacted] with "Go Big [redacted]"



The [redacted] made themselves known, chanting "Go Big [redacted] and [redacted] to 80-62 win."

Facebook · [redacted]
3.9K+ reactions · [redacted] months ago

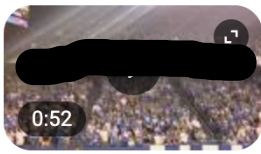
We sure do love a road Go Big [redacted] chant | [redacted] ...



We sure do love a road Go Big [redacted] chant.

YouTube · [redacted]
8.1K+ views · 13 years ago

"Go Big [redacted]" chant before [redacted] basketball arrives.



"Go Big [redacted] chant before [redacted] basketball arrives. 8.1K views · 13 years ago ...more. [redacted] 1.75K. Subscribe. 26. Share.

Facebook · [redacted]
1K+ reactions · 7 years ago

Nothing quite like a Go Big [redacted] chant away from home ...

APPENDIX G: Examples of Participant 4 Artifacts



[Redacted]

AI Mode All Videos News Images Shopping Short videos More Tools

AI Overview

The common chant for [Redacted] "Go [Redacted]" is a simple call-and-response: "Go [Redacted]!" and "Go [Redacted]". The Alma Mater song starts with "[Redacted]" though it's not a chanted football chant. [\[Link\]](#)

- **"Go [Redacted]!" chant:** The most common and simple chant is simply repeating "Go [Redacted]! Go [Redacted]."
- **Alma Mater song:** The official Alma Mater song is not a chant but has sung lyrics: [Redacted] [\[Link\]](#)

"I will be forever grateful for the experiences, support, memories, challenges, and so much more that [Redacted] has provided me. The coaches, administrators, and staff are committed to providing an exceptional student-athlete experience for our teams and I'm excited to see [Redacted] Athletics continue to shine. [Redacted] is a special place filled with incredible people who strive to serve the college's mission each day. I am excited to have the opportunity to remain at [Redacted] and serve as the senior director of alumni and family engagement in our Advancement Office. This department is filled with enthusiastic and driven individuals, and I am looking forward to working with their team. Forever, GO [Redacted]"

These and many other alumni are profiled in this issue of [Redacted]. Their success is an excellent reminder that the world continues to need [Redacted] graduates as we confront the issues of today while finding a deep sense of meaning and purpose within ourselves. In all of these stories is a common thread: They didn't get to where they are by themselves. They had help from our wonderful community of [Redacted]. That is the way we move forward; through collaboration, with a steady focus on our mission. Stay tuned this year for opportunities to meet, partner and contribute to our goal of sustaining [Redacted] for many generations to come – in order to produce more exemplary [Redacted]

Go [Redacted]

– Joe

APPENDIX H: Examples of Participant 5 Artifacts



AI Mode All Images Videos Short videos More ▾



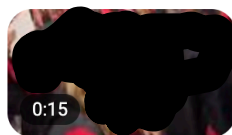
The chant "Go Big [REDACTED] is a simple but powerful rally cry for the [REDACTED] and its sports teams. The chant has no official "lyrics," but rather a back-and-forth cadence often used by fans at sporting events. [↗](#)

How to do the "Go Big [REDACTED]" chant

- **Leader:** Chants a drawn-out "Goooooo Biiiiiiiig [REDACTED]".
- **Fans:** Respond with a sharp and loud "GO! BIG! [REDACTED]".
- **The origin:** The chant has a history that goes back to the early days of [REDACTED] athletics. The term "Go Big [REDACTED]" became associated with the university's fight song [REDACTED] written in 1920.
- **The colors:** The university's official colors, [REDACTED] were selected by students in 1892.
- **The nickname:** [REDACTED] [↗](#)

Instagram [redacted]
4K+ likes · 6 months ago

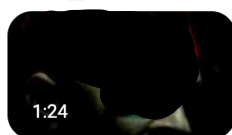
First "Go Big [redacted]" chant has [redacted] for alums [redacted]



This 50-mile march between [redacted] aims to support suicide prevention and encourage the importance of personal well-being.

TikTok · [redacted]
3.6K+ views · 2 months ago

[redacted] Hype Video - Go Big [redacted]



Reddit [redacted]
140+ comments · 1 year ago

how does one respond to "go big [redacted]"? : [redacted]

This is a tradition at all [redacted] sporting events so really the only reply is [redacted] right back to them.

149 answers · Top answer: If they say "gooooooooo biiiiiiiiig [redacted]" you say "GO BI...

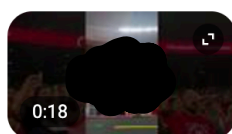
Go Big [redacted] ... 58 answers Aug 15, 2021

Is it just me, or is the Go Big [redacted] chant dying? : r ... 15 answers Oct 11, 2017

[More results from www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)

YouTube · R [redacted]
5.3K+ views · 2 months ago

[redacted] Football Go Big [redacted] Chant Takes Over [redacted]



[redacted]



EXHIBITION

Go Big

August 16, 2025 through January 4, 2026

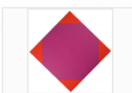
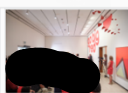
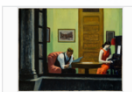
The chant. The team. The energy. The art.

The exhibition *Go Big* presents numerous perspectives on the power of — the school color chosen by students in 1892.

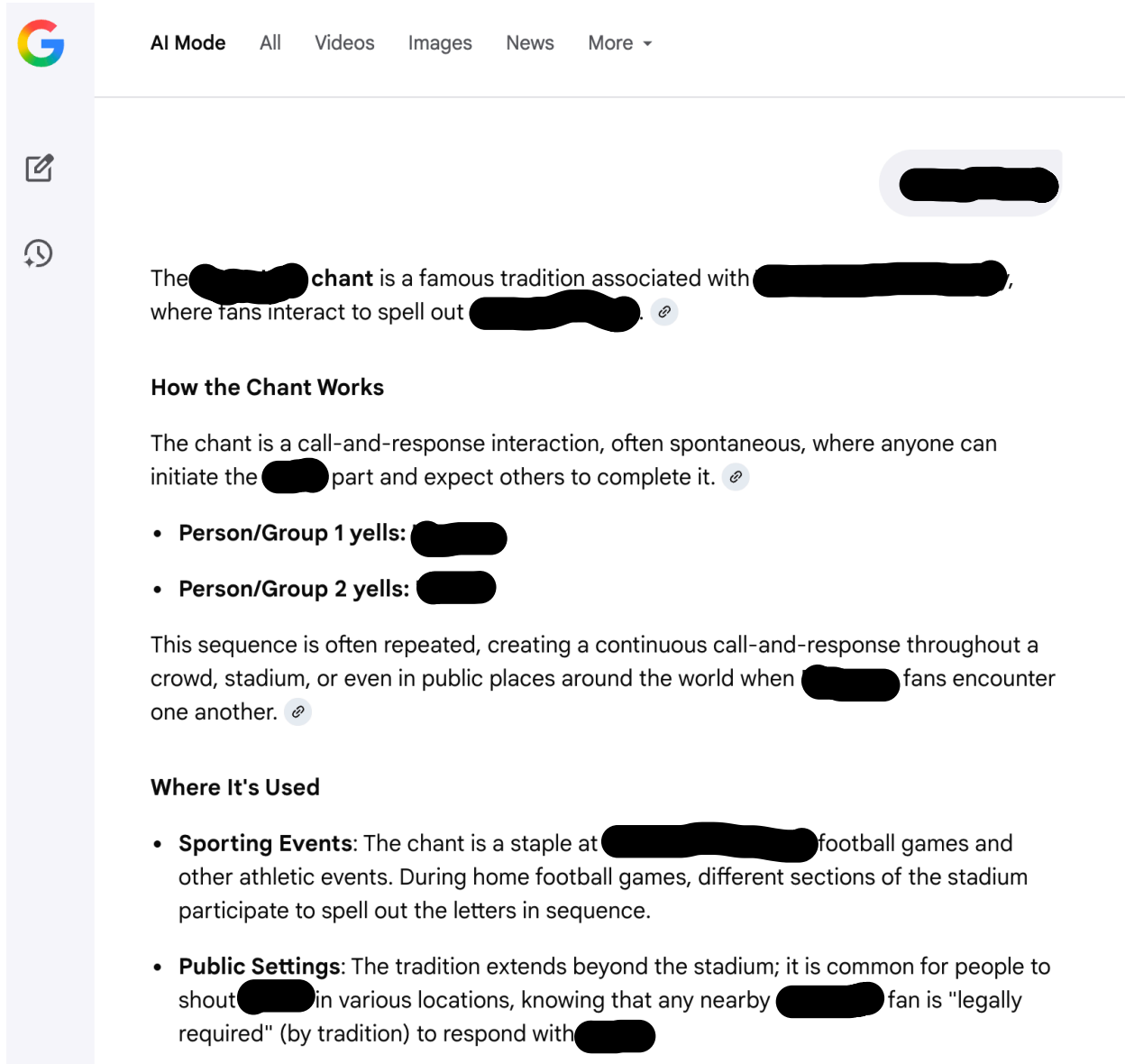
Each artwork was selected from the museum's collection by a member of the university community that extends from the campus to the city of the state, and beyond. The chosen works span history, genres, styles, and media, just as the participants and their reflections represent the distinctive individuals who have come together to realize this exhibition.

Exhibition support provided by

Go Big was organized by Erin Hanas, curator for academic and campus engagement, in collaboration with forty-five guest co-curators, including students, staff, faculty, administrators, athletic coaches, alumni, and friends of the university.



APPENDIX I: Examples of Participant 6 Artifacts



The **chant** is a famous tradition associated with [REDACTED], where fans interact to spell out [REDACTED].

How the Chant Works

The chant is a call-and-response interaction, often spontaneous, where anyone can initiate the [REDACTED] part and expect others to complete it.

- **Person/Group 1 yells:** [REDACTED]
- **Person/Group 2 yells:** [REDACTED]

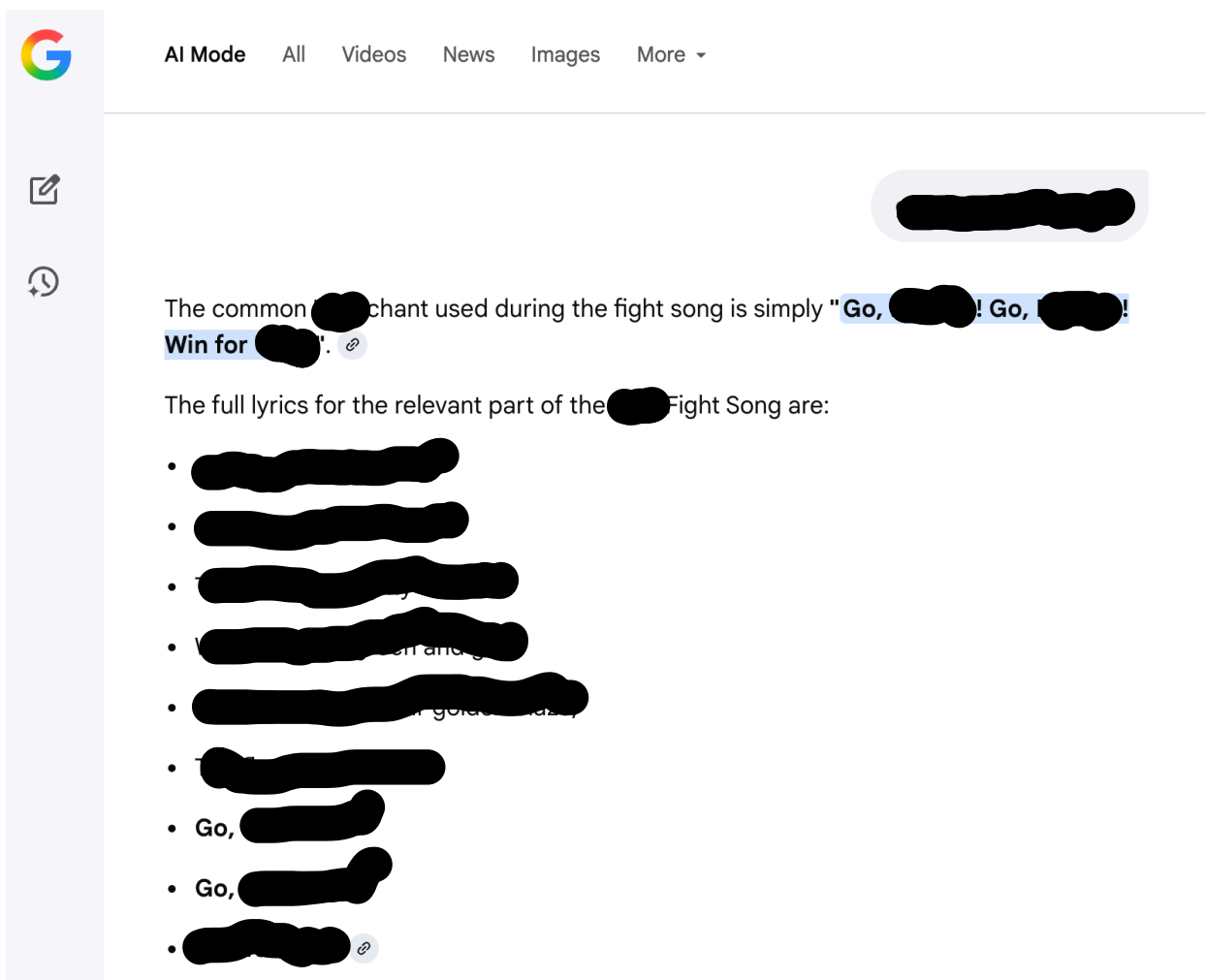
This sequence is often repeated, creating a continuous call-and-response throughout a crowd, stadium, or even in public places around the world when [REDACTED] fans encounter one another.

Where It's Used

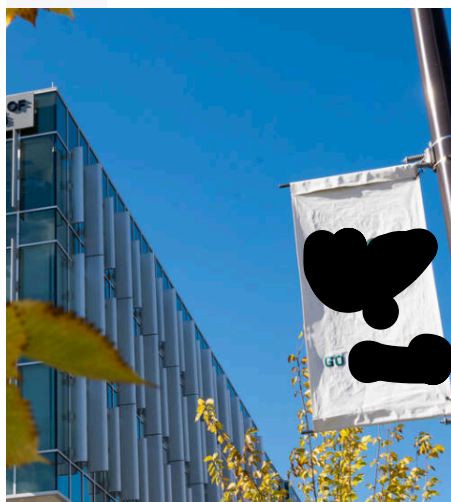
- **Sporting Events:** The chant is a staple at [REDACTED] football games and other athletic events. During home football games, different sections of the stadium participate to spell out the letters in sequence.
- **Public Settings:** The tradition extends beyond the stadium; it is common for people to shout [REDACTED] in various locations, knowing that any nearby [REDACTED] fan is "legally required" (by tradition) to respond with [REDACTED].



APPENDIX J: Examples of Participant 7 Artifacts



The screenshot shows a Google search interface. At the top left is the Google logo. Below it are navigation options: "AI Mode", "All", "Videos", "News", "Images", and "More". On the left side, there are icons for a document, a clock, and a plus sign. The main content area contains a redacted search result. The text reads: "The common [redacted] chant used during the fight song is simply "Go, [redacted]! Go, [redacted]! Win for [redacted]". [redacted]". Below this, it says "The full lyrics for the relevant part of the [redacted] Fight Song are:" followed by a bulleted list of redacted lyrics. The first few items are completely redacted, while the last two are "Go, [redacted]" and "Go, [redacted]".



[Redacted]

Spirit Songs | Homecoming

They are the mighty [Redacted] Who wear the [Redacted] Tonight let's fire their golden [Redacted]. The flame of victory. Go, [Redacted] Go, [Redacted]! Win [Redacted] ...

[Redacted]

Athletics Official Athletic Site - Traditions

Jun 10, 2017 — Who wear the [Redacted] and [Redacted] Tonight let's fire their golden [Redacted]. The flame of victory. Go [Redacted] Go [Redacted]! Win for [Redacted] Traditions ...

[Redacted]

Spirit | Students

They are the mighty [Redacted] Who wear the [Redacted] Tonight let's fire their golden [Redacted]. The flame of victory. Go, [Redacted] Go, [Redacted] Win for [Redacted]



Genius

[Redacted]

Fight Song

They are the mighty [Redacted] Who wear the [Redacted] [Chorus] Tonight, let's fire their golden [Redacted]. The flame of victory. Go, [Redacted]! Go, [Redacted]! Win for ...

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