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It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Can Pay: Contrasting For-profit
and Nonprofit College Home Pages from a Political Economist Perspective

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Abstract

The oligopoly that nonprofit colleges once enjoyed is now over due to competition from for-profit colleges. Using a political economist perspective, this study contrasts the new for-profit college home pages to that of the veteran nonprofit colleges. A content analysis of 35 for-profit college home pages and 35 nonprofit college home pages reveals a range of significant differences in the areas of academics, target audience, campus information, financials, home page organization, imagery, and student life.

It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Can Pay: Contrasting For-profit and Nonprofit College Home Pages from a Political Economist Perspective

The oligopoly that public and private nonprofit colleges once enjoyed is now over; for-profit colleges have joined as primary contenders in the higher education arena. Within the past several years, for-profit college enrollment increased from 365,000 students to almost 1.8 million, and in 2009 students at for-profit colleges received more than \$20 billion in federal loans (*For-profit colleges: Undercover testing*, 2010). With for-profit college students claiming such a substantial amount of federal dollars, the federal government conducted an investigation to ensure its money was well spent. In its investigation of 15 for-profit colleges, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) “found that four colleges encouraged fraudulent practices and that all 15 made deceptive or otherwise questionable statements to GAO’s undercover applicants” (*For-profit colleges: Undercover testing*, 2010, p. 2). If quality admission procedures at for-profit colleges are lacking, then are quality education and services lacking as well?

From a political economist perspective, being designated a “for-profit” college suggests that those colleges exist for exactly that purpose: for profit. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Education found that “students at for-profit institutions represent 11% of all higher education students, 26% of all student loans and 43% of all loan defaulters” (Hamilton, 2010, p. 1). With a large number of students attending for-profit colleges and bearing a disproportionate amount of debt, it is imperative to these students that these institutions offer equal or better education and student services as those offered by nonprofit institutions.

In this study, a content analysis of college home pages was conducted to examine if colleges’ designation as a for-profit or nonprofit institution influences what information the

colleges deem most important to relay to interested audiences, as indicated by the content they choose to place on their home pages. College Web sites were selected as the unit of analysis because they are increasingly becoming the initial contact point, and often the only contact point with prospective students (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2009), making them the institution's primary marketing tool. The value of this study rests in determining what the differences in college home page organization, imagery and content indicates about the political economies of for-profit and nonprofit colleges and what these findings mean to stakeholders, such as prospective and current college students, college faculty, and staff.

Literature Review

College Web Sites

College Web sites are uniquely interesting to investigate because of the rare relationship between the institution and the customer in which the customer chooses which institutions to apply for admission and the institution mutually chooses which customers to admit (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2009). Examining this unique customer relationship is complicated by the lack of consensus among researchers regarding academic home page elements. Pook and Lefond (2001) argue that prospective students find Web content the most influential in their decision to apply to a particular college, followed by Web page organization, and lastly a focus on the targeted audience. Pook and Lefond (2001) assert that prospective students favor Web sites organized by target audience, such as prospective students, rather than by function, such as admissions, but Middleton, McConnell and Davidson (1999) contradict this finding, contending that organizing a Web site as such "narrowly" categorizes users and is "impracticable" (p. 222).

In Pook's 2006 study, he found that graduate students viewed online photos as "distracting" and providing "no substantive purpose" (p. 787). However, Vilnai-Yavetz and

Tifferet (2009) used an experimental design to manipulate the presence and content of images on academic Web sites and found that feelings of “pleasantness” and “perceived attractiveness” were significantly higher for Web sites with images as compared to Web sites without. They also found that images of buildings are preferred over images of people and abstract symbols and decorations are preferred over images of buildings and people (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2009).

Although specific formats and guidelines do not dictate the design of college Web sites, Roberta Astroff’s (2001) content analysis of 111 college Web sites revealed “remarkably similar” layout and design elements, thereby suggesting the development of a college Web site genre. In her study, Astroff (2001) examined if college home pages linked to library information. She found that only 61% included a library hyperlink on the home page, which Astroff (2001) inferred as representative of “how the university administration thinks of its libraries” (p. 95), supporting that home page content is correlated to the institution’s priorities.

Higher education research rarely includes profit status, but Armstrong (2001) is a significant exception. Although for-profit colleges were not significant contenders in the academic arena at the time of his study, Armstrong (2001) predicted that for-profit colleges would increasingly become competitive and therefore “ultimately more pernicious from the standpoint of traditional higher education than generally understood” (p. 479). He argues that for-profits are improving their competitive edge by attaining accreditation and by creating a niche through targeting working adults with distance learning, and partnering with corporations, such as AT&T and Sprint, to offer continuing education opportunities to their employees (Armstrong, 2001). With more emphasis placed on distance learning, for-profit colleges focus less, or not at all, on providing “social infrastructures,” such as residence halls and athletic teams, and for-profits often rent buildings rather than own (Armstrong, 2001).

Political Economy

Economies are comprised of networks of relationships “by virtue of their self-organizing, social nature” (Sriramesh & Duhé, 2009, p. 369). Therefore, “the tie between political economies and public relations is intuitively pleasing, as relationships are the hallmark of public relations theory and practice” (Sriramesh & Duhé, 2009, p. 369). In other words, political economies and public relations are firmly tied because both are based on relationships at their core. To examine a phenomenon from a political economist perspective is to scrutinize the social, economic, and political relationships and forces. Research shows that the elites behind these social, economic, and political relationships and forces remain in control through the use of public relations (Arndt, 1983; Sriramesh & Duhé, 2009). For these reasons, Sriramesh and Duhé (2009) argue that public relations and political economy are inherently interrelated, and therefore, a political economist perspective is an appropriate mode of which to analyze public relations.

With a political economist perspective as an established framework of which to investigate public relations, several trends have developed. First, investigators often compare the primary phenomenon under examination to a closely related phenomenon. In the case of Wall (2004), Internet music radio, the primary phenomenon, was compared to over-the-air radio, a closely related phenomenon, and Cohen (2008) compared Facebook, the primary phenomenon, to MySpace and YouTube, closely related phenomena. Contrasting the political economy of a phenomenon to a closely related phenomenon offers a point of reference or ruler by which to measure the primary phenomenon under investigation.

Another trend in utilizing a political economist perspective is examining the topic from multiple angles. Rarely do political economists analyze just the social aspect or just the political aspect or just the economic aspect. Instead, theorists examine the social, political and economic

aspects of a phenomenon collectively. For example, Cohen (2008) examined Facebook from a social angle by analyzing the effects of a new social interface on society, from a political angle by assessing the power structure of the owner with Facebook users, and from an economic angle by scrutinizing how an “unpaid” labor force sustains Facebook and the effects of introducing advertising to the platform. Wall (2004) similarly examined online radio from a social perspective by investigating the new relationship between broadcasters and listeners, from a political perspective by researching the ownership of online radio, and from an economic perspective by analyzing the production costs and the market system prior to and after the introduction of Internet radio.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is systematic, objective, replicable and provides a logical basis for understanding how messages are constructed as well as inferring what the content indicates about its originator (Boyer et al., 2006). Credibility is enhanced by providing a detailed description of the method, employing a pretest and maintaining an appropriate level of inter-coder reliability. This methodology is increasingly being implemented in communication studies, and more specifically, content analysis of Web sites has been growing for the past 10 years (McMillan et al., 2008).

Content analyses of Web sites are most commonly coded dichotomously, for the absence or presence of specific online features, but Web sites can also be coded utilizing a three-point Likert-type scale with one signifying “not at all” to three, signifying “very much” (Tian, 2008). Another common feature of content analyses is coding for multiple features to test a single hypothesis. For example, to test if Chinese companies score higher on power distance, a cultural dimension, than American companies, Tian (2008) coded for Web content about the company’s

relationship with the government, if the Web site mentioned awards and recognition, and if the Web site contained information about the company being visited by authorities and celebrities. Home pages are often the unit of analysis, as opposed to the entire Web site, because of “the importance of this initial information gateway” (Esrock & Leichy, 2000), first impressions are critical to whether a user will peruse a Web site (Ha & James, 1998) and the home page offers a consistent unit of analysis (Boyer et al., 2006). Commonly coded online elements include photos and their content and Web organization.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine how for-profit and nonprofit college home pages differ and what those differences mean to the political economy of the two sets of colleges. Research shows that “the most efficient and effective method” for college home page organization is by target audience (Poock & Lefond, 2001, p. 19). Therefore, the first research question is:

RQ₁ Do for-profit and nonprofit college home pages differ significantly in their organization, be it by target audience, function or a combination?

With regard to the finding that college home pages are best organized by target audience, it is not only important to understand if they are organized by target audience, but what audiences are being targeted. As such, the second research question is:

RQ₂ Which target audiences, if any, are most targeted on for-profit college home pages compared to nonprofit college home pages?

With college profit status as the independent variable, it is logical to examine how for-profit and nonprofit colleges differ with regard to financials:

RQ₃ Are financial functions more popular on for-profit or nonprofit college home pages?

Armstrong (2001) found that for-profit colleges tend to focus on distance learning and often rent rather own facilities. Hence, it is important to investigate how and if for-profit and nonprofit college home pages differ in the campus information presented:

RQ₄ Is campus information discussed more on for-profit or nonprofit college home pages, and what campus information is presented?

With fewer facilities come fewer public areas in which students can socialize. Therefore, it is necessary to examine if this lack of facilities affects student services and activities available:

RQ₅ Is student life information discussed more on for-profit or nonprofit college home pages, and what student life aspects are present?

Of course the most important aspect of either a for-profit or nonprofit college home page should be its academic information. Therefore, the sixth research question is:

RQ₆ Are academic functions more prevalent on for-profit or nonprofit college home pages, and what academic aspects are present?

Research shows that feelings of “pleasantness” and “perceived attractiveness” increase if Web sites contain images (Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2009); therefore, it is important to investigate if for-profit and nonprofits differ in images used:

RQ₇ Does the imagery on for-profit college home pages differ from the imagery on nonprofit college home pages? If so, how do they differ?

Method

Sample

To investigate for-profit colleges’ focus on education, students and services, a comparative content analysis of 35 for-profit college home pages versus 35 nonprofit college home pages was conducted. The 35 for-profit college Web sites were selected from the

Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities' (APSCU) membership Web page by beginning at the top of the list and selecting every 10th Web site. The APSCU is a voluntary membership organization with more than 1,400 accredited, private postsecondary school members that are mostly for-profit. The 35 nonprofit college Web sites were selected from the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) membership Web page by starting at the top of the list and selecting every 20th Web site. Due to the increased number of colleges on this list, every 20th Web site was selected in order to examine colleges throughout the alphabetical list and not only those toward the beginning. According to its Web site, the AAC&U is "the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education." Further, all AAC&U member colleges and universities are nonprofit organizations.

When selecting a college from one of the aforementioned lists, if a college didn't have a Web site listed, the next college listed was selected. After selecting a college from the list, the Carnegie Foundation Classification of either for-profit or nonprofit was verified by searching for the institution's name on the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Institution Lookup Web page. The Carnegie Foundation is an independent policy and research center that is chartered by an Act of Congress.

Procedure

A coding sheet was developed and was largely based on the coding sheet used in Will's thesis (2004). However, Will's coding sheet included an exhaustive list of possible online information, whereas the coding sheet for this study only included topics pertaining to the research questions. The coding sheet includes 92 variables, which are organized into seven categories, with each category corresponding to a research question. The sections include

academics, audience, campus information, financials, home page organization, images and student life. A pretest of five for-profit and five nonprofit college home pages was conducted. The coding sheet was then revised to eliminate topics not present and to add relevant topics previously absent from the coding sheet. The final coding sheet can be found in the Appendix. Basic information such as the college name, profit status and home page organization, were coded. Then coders examined the home page for the presence of the other variables listed on the coding sheet. In one instance, a landing page allowed users to enter the Web site in English or Spanish. Therefore, English was selected and the subsequent Web page was coded. Coders were instructed only to code for the items on the home page. If coders were unsure of the meaning of a hyperlink, they were instructed to click on the hyperlink to get more information on the nature of the topic. However, coders were not to code the information on the subsequent page. Coders were instructed to code for items found on drop-down menus. If a drop-down menu appeared by placing the cursor over the word, then the coder was instructed to code the items. If a menu appeared only after clicking on a hyperlink, this menu was not considered part of the home page, and therefore was not coded.

To test for inter-coder reliability, five trained independent coders collectively coded 20% (i.e. seven for-profit and seven nonprofit college home pages) to be compared to the 70 coded by the researcher. Cohen's Kappa was used to calculate inter-coder reliability. The inter-coder reliability for the coders was found to be $Kappa = .84$ ($p < .001$).

Findings

Two-way contingency table analyses were conducted to compare the content of for-profit college home pages to nonprofit college home pages. The first research question relates to the organization of college home pages, with the two variables being profit status of the college Web

site (for-profit or nonprofit) and organization of the home page (target audience, function, or combination). Note that in Table 1, profit status and home page organization were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 20.74, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .54$. For-profit college home pages were near evenly split between function and a combination of target audience and function. Contrastingly, all nonprofit college home pages were organized using a combination of target audience and function hyperlinks.

Table 1

Research Question 1: Home Page Organization

Organization	For-Profit	Nonprofit
Target Audience	0%	0%
Function	45%	0%
Combination	54%	100%

The second research question relates to which audiences are targeted on for-profit college home pages compared to nonprofit college home pages, and the results are summarized in Table 2. The only hyperlink for a targeted audience that was significantly found more often on for-profit college home pages than on nonprofit college home pages was for businesses and employers. The relationships among profit status and donors, media, military/veterans, and other audiences were not significantly related.

Table 2*Research Question 2: Target Audience*

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
Alumni	.22	.91	33.60***	.69
Businesses/Employers	.28	.08	4.62*	.25
Community	.0	.11	4.24*	.24
Faculty and Staff	.22	.74	18.52***	.51
Friends	.0	.51	24.23***	.58
Parents and Family	.14	.54	12.42***	.42
Prospective Students	.28	.71	12.85***	.42
Students	.25	.82	23.02***	.57
Visitors	.0	.37	15.96***	.47

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Research question three focused on whether financial content differed by college profit status, and the results are summarized in Table 3. The relationships among profit status and expenses/tuition costs/fees, financial aid, the foundation, payment methods/information, and scholarships/grants were not significantly related.

Table 3*Research Question 3: Financials*

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
Cashier/Bursar	.0	.14	5.38*	.27
Giving Back	.02	.88	51.80***	.86

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The fourth research question regards the relationship between profit status and the presence of campus information. The findings are summarized in Table 4. The only campus information significantly found more often on for-profit college home pages than on nonprofit college home pages was a hyperlink to satellite campuses. The relationships among profit status and campus construction, campus theater, campus tours/visit campus, emergency information, facilities, gallery, state information, transportation, videos, and virtual tours were not significantly related.

Table 4*Research Question 4: Campus Information*

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
Arts	.0	.22	9.03**	.35
Campus Police/Safety	.08	.42	10.76**	.39
Community Information	.08	.28	4.62*	.25
Directions/Maps	.31	.71	11.20**	.40
Housing/Residential Life	.05	.51	17.92***	.50
Museum	.0	.11	4.24*	.24
Parking	.0	.17	6.56*	.30
Satellite Campuses	.65	.25	11.28*	.40
Student Union	.05	.34	8.92**	.35
Weather	.0	.22	9.03**	.35

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

To examine the fifth research question, two-way contingency table analyses were conducted for profit status and student life aspects. The results are summarized in Table 5. The only student life hyperlink significantly found more often on for-profit college home pages than nonprofits' are links to testimonials. The relationships among profit status and community outreach/volunteer opportunities, disability services, intramural sports, leadership development, student rights and responsibilities, and student services and resources were not significantly related.

Table 5*Research Question 5: Student Life*

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
Athletics	.02	.91	55.09***	.88
Campus Life/Student Life	.14	.62	17.42***	.49
Campus Ministries	.0	.20	7.77**	.33
Counseling	.0	.17	6.56*	.30
Dining	.05	.34	8.92**	.35
Diversity	.0	.11	4.24*	.24
Extracurricular Activities	.08	.40	9.40**	.36
Health Services	.0	.31	13.05***	.43
News and Events	.68	.97	10.05**	.37
Orientation	.0	.17	6.56*	.30
School Media	.08	.28	4.62*	.25
Student Profiles	.11	.34	5.18*	.27
Testimonials	.34	.05	8.92*	.35

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The sixth research question concerns the effects of profit status on academic information. The results are summarized in Table 6. The relationships among profit status and academic advising, academic calendar, academic programs/degrees, cancellations/closings, certifications/professional development/continuing education, dean's list, exam schedules,

grades, graduate data/statistics, graduation requirements, online programs, transcript information, and tutoring were not significantly related.

Table 6

Research Question 6: Academic Information

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
Academic Schools	.14	.37	4.78*	.26
Accreditation	.60	.17	13.56***	.44
Career Services	.60	.31	5.75*	.28
Course Information	.25	.51	4.88*	.26
Rankings	.05	.25	5.28*	.27
Library	.22	.82	25.28***	.60
Research	.0	.37	15.96***	.47
Study Abroad	.02	.40	14.33***	.45

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Research question seven regards the relationship between profit status and images on the home page. The results are summarized in Table 7. The relationships among profit status and rotating image, photos of lecturers, photos of students, photos of the interior of buildings, and college/university insignia/seal were not significantly related.

Table 7*Research Question 7: Images*

	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Pearson Chi-square	Cramér's V
New Image with Visit	.02	.20	5.08*	.26
Alumni Photos	.0	.28	11.66**	.40
Building Exterior	.14	.65	19.28***	.52

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

This study reveals that for-profit college home pages significantly differ from nonprofit college home pages. Roughly half of for-profit college home pages are organized by function (i.e. academic advising, research, etc.), and half are organized by a combination of function-centered hyperlinks and audience-focused hyperlinks (i.e. alumni, prospective students, students, etc.). In great contrast, all of the nonprofit college home pages were organized by a combination of function and target audience hyperlinks. In Poock and Lefond's survey (2001), prospective college students indicated that they prefer hyperlinks to be grouped by target audience. Inarguably, nonprofit colleges take into account the differing needs of respective audience groups, but only half of for-profit colleges organize their home pages based on the needs of people. Hence, only about half of for-profit college home pages organize their home pages with the target audience in mind.

Not only do for-profit and nonprofit college home pages differ in organizing links by target audiences, but they also differ in which audiences are targeted. Alumni are targeted on 91% of the nonprofit college home pages and only 22% of the for-profit college home pages.

Perhaps as newer competitors in the higher education arena, for-profit colleges haven't yet realized the benefit of soliciting alumni donations. This is supported by the findings that 88% of nonprofit college home pages contain a "giving back" link compared to only 2% of for-profits, and 28% of nonprofit college home pages contain one or more photos of alumni compared to none of for-profits. Clearly, nonprofit college home pages target potential donors more than for-profit college home pages.

Another reason for-profit college home pages may not provide a link for alumni is that with a relatively brief history, for-profits may have yet to build a substantial number of alumni. As such, for-profits may not see the need for an alumni link if only a small number of people will actually utilize the link. In addition to requesting donations, nonprofit colleges often contact alumni to invite them to events. It is conceivable that for-profits do not host as many, or any, alumni events, thereby decreasing the need for an alumni link. This supposition is also supported by the finding that 11% of nonprofits have links for members of the community, compared to none of for-profit home pages. The absence of links for members of the community on for-profit college home pages may be indicative of the lack of overall events, not just alumni-centered events, hosted by for-profit colleges. Without events on campus, for-profit colleges are less likely to have members of the community or visitors on campus, which would explain why none of the for-profit college home pages provide links for visitors, compared to 37% of nonprofit college home pages.

Hosting events is more difficult for colleges with limited facilities. For-profits tend to offer more distance-learning classes than nonprofits, thereby decreasing the need for actual facilities, and the facilities that for-profits do use, are usually rented rather than owned (Armstrong, 2001). Colleges commonly present theater performances, but none of the for-profit

college home pages included links to the arts, compared to 22% of nonprofits. The supposition that for-profit campuses lack physical infrastructure compared to nonprofits is supported by the findings that only 5% of for-profit home pages have a link to housing/residential life compared to 51% of nonprofits and only 5% of for-profit home pages contained a student union link compared to 34% of nonprofits.

Another significant variance in physical infrastructure is the difference in library links. Nonprofit college home pages were nearly four times as likely to contain a library link than for-profits. Perhaps for-profit library links are not on the home page, but can be found elsewhere on their Web site, or more shocking, perhaps some for-profits simply do not have libraries. If for-profits do not offer library services, it is arguable that for-profits are not providing adequate studying facilities or academic resources, which are essential to learning. With less students actually residing, studying, and attending class on campus, the need for campus police/safety would decrease, as supported by the finding that 8% of for-profits supported such a link compared to 42% of nonprofits. Lastly, if facilities are rented rather than owned, for-profits are less likely to celebrate their facilities as evidenced by the finding that only 14% of for-profit college home pages contain photos of building exteriors compared to 65% of nonprofit college home pages.

As for-profits place less emphasis on a physical campus, there is less of a campus for students to frequent, and therefore, fewer students visit campus, which results in less of a demand for student services. This is supported by the finding that none of the for-profit college home pages provided links to counseling services, compared to 17% of nonprofits, and none of the for-profit home pages provided links to health services, compared to 31% of nonprofits. Not only do nonprofits appear to make student services a higher priority than for-profits, but

nonprofits also appear to provide more social opportunities for students. Athletics provide students the opportunity to join a team, formally join cheer squads, and informally cheer from the stands, thereby involving many students in a single activity. Only 2% of for-profit college home pages contained a link to athletics compared to 91% of nonprofits, which is a tremendous difference. Social activities for college students are often termed campus life and extracurricular activities. Only 14% of for-profits include campus life links, whereas 62% of nonprofits do, and 8% of for-profits include extracurricular activities links, whereas 40% of nonprofits do. This is further supported by the finding that museum, campus ministries, dining, diversity, orientation information, and school media were all significantly found more often on nonprofit college home pages. Although not important to many nontraditional students, these social development aspects are important to many traditional students and appear to be lacking on most for-profit college home pages. This may be indicative of for-profits colleges catering to nontraditional students whereas nonprofit colleges tend to cater more to traditional students.

Another indicator that nonprofit college home pages tend to target traditional students is the presence of a link for parents and families. A link for parents and families appeared on 54% of nonprofit college home pages compared to only 14% of for-profit college home pages. Parents and families of traditional students are more likely to be involved in the decision process of where their child will attend college than the parents and families of nontraditional students, which would account for this variance in parents and families links.

Nontraditional students often work full-time while pursuing a higher education, and therefore have a greater need for distance learning than do traditional students. A physical infrastructure is not as much of a precursor for distance learning as it is for a traditional classroom setting. Hence, it is easier for for-profit colleges to establish satellite campuses

because their need for buildings is not as great as nonprofits. This is supported by the finding that 65% of for-profit college home pages contain a link to satellite campuses compared to only 25% of nonprofits. Further, 28% of nonprofit college home pages contained community information compared to only 8% of for-profits. With multiple satellite campuses, the community information would change for each one. As such, it follows that only colleges with a single location would likely include community information on its home page. For-profit satellite campuses are likely to be primarily located in the U.S. because only 2% of for-profit college home pages contained study abroad information compared to 40% of nonprofits. This could also be indicative of for-profits' emphasis on online courses because online courses' key advantage is eliminating travel.

Armstrong (2001) found that for-profit colleges target businesses with continuing education and professional development opportunities for their employees more often than nonprofits. This is supported by the finding that 28% of for-profit college home pages contained a link to businesses and employers whereas only 8% of nonprofits did. As such, for-profits appear to focus more on teaching skills that can directly be applied in the workplace rather than hypothetical and theoretical exploration. It follows then that 60% of for-profit college home pages contain a link to career services compared to only 31% of nonprofits, which is evidence of for-profits orientation toward preparing employees for the workplace. Additionally, none of the for-profit home pages contain research links compared to 37% of nonprofits, which is indicative of nonprofits placing more emphasis on hypothetical and theoretical exploration.

Although nonprofits and for-profits appear to approach academics differently, they are both institutions of higher education, so academics should be of primary importance, regardless of profit status. Interestingly, 51% of nonprofit college home pages and 25% of for-profits

contained course information. Of course this information might be categorized elsewhere, such as under academic programs or schools. Also within the academics category, 60% of for-profit college home pages contained accreditation information compared to only 17% of nonprofits. Although all 70 colleges examined are accredited by some external accrediting agency, the for-profits colleges appear to place more emphasis on accreditation. Perhaps this is due to that accreditation of for-profit colleges is a more recent development compared to that of nonprofits (Armstrong, 2001). Therefore, nonprofits might be supposing that people assume they are accredited whereas people may not assume that a for-profit is accredited, which is why accreditation information is found more often on for-profit college home pages.

Accreditation is not the only way that colleges convey value to prospective students. For-profits indicate a preference for testimonials to showcase academic excellence, with 34% of for-profit college home pages containing testimonials, compared to only 5% of nonprofits. On the other hand, nonprofits prefer to highlight their competitive advantages through institution rankings, with 25% of nonprofit college home pages containing institution rankings compared to only 5% of for-profits. Arguably, institution rankings are factually based whereas testimonials are opinion-based, thereby putting more value on rankings over testimonials. Perhaps their recent introduction to higher education arena could explain why for-profits have fewer institution rankings to celebrate.

The disparities between for-profit and nonprofit college home pages can partially be attributed to that for-profit colleges home pages tend to contain fewer hyperlinks than nonprofit college home pages. Perhaps for-profit colleges don't place as much emphasis on Web sites in their marketing plans as do nonprofit colleges. Clearly, there are significant differences between for-profit and nonprofit colleges, but inarguably, competition encourages innovation and price

reduction. So as the for-profit college industry continues to grow, more innovation and affordability can be expected of higher education institutions.

A limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size. This and other limitations of this study could be corrected in future research. For example, future studies could investigate not only the home pages of for-profit and nonprofit colleges, but the entire Web sites of these institutions. This study only investigated American for-profit and nonprofit colleges, but future research could also examine foreign for-profit and nonprofit colleges.

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Appendix

Coding Sheet

Coder Name _____

Date Coded _____

College Name _____

1. _____ For-Profit _____ Nonprofit
 2. Home Page Organization: _____ Target Audience _____ Function _____ Combination

Academics

3. _____ Academic Advising
 4. _____ Academic Calendar
 5. _____ Academic Programs/Degrees
 6. _____ Academic Schools
 7. _____ Accreditation
 8. _____ Cancellations/Closings
 9. _____ Career Services
 10. _____ Certifications/Professional Development/Continuing Education
 11. _____ Course Search/Course Catalog/Course Schedule
 12. _____ Dean's List
 13. _____ Exam Schedules
 14. _____ Grades
 15. _____ Graduate Data/Statistics
 16. _____ Graduation Requirements
 17. _____ Institution Reputation/Rankings
 18. _____ Library
 19. _____ Online Programs
 20. _____ Research
 21. _____ Study Abroad
 22. _____ Transcript Information
 23. _____ Tutoring

Audience

24. _____ Alumni
 25. _____ Businesses and Employers/Hire Our Grads
 26. _____ Community
 27. _____ Donors
 28. _____ Faculty and Staff
 29. _____ Friends
 30. _____ Media/Media Relations
 31. _____ Military/Veterans/Military Benefits
 32. _____ Parents and Family
 33. _____ Prospective Students
 34. _____ Students (generally)
 35. _____ Visitors
 36. _____ Other _____

Campus Information

- 37. _____ Arts
- 38. _____ Campus Construction
- 39. _____ Campus Police/Safety
- 40. _____ Campus Theater
- 41. _____ Campus Tours/Visit Campus
- 42. _____ Community Information
- 43. _____ Directions/Maps
- 44. _____ Emergency Information
- 45. _____ Facilities
- 46. _____ Gallery (Art, etc.)
- 47. _____ Housing/Residential Life
- 48. _____ Museums
- 49. _____ Parking
- 50. _____ Satellite Campuses/Other Locations
- 51. _____ State Information
- 52. _____ Student Union/Center
- 53. _____ Transportation
- 54. _____ Videos
- 55. _____ Virtual Tours
- 56. _____ Weather Conditions

Financials

- 57. _____ Cashier/Bursar
- 58. _____ Expenses/Tuition Costs/Fees
- 59. _____ Financial Aid
- 60. _____ Foundation
- 61. _____ Giving Back
- 62. _____ Payment Methods/Information
- 63. _____ Scholarships/Grants

Images

- 64. _____ Rotating Image
- 65. _____ New Image With Each Visit
- 66. _____ Photo of Alumni
- 67. _____ Photo of Lecturers
- 68. _____ Photo of Students
- 69. _____ Photo of Building Exterior
- 70. _____ Photo of Building Interior
- 71. _____ College/University Insignia/Seal /Logo
- 72. _____ Other _____

Student Life

- 73. _____ Athletics
- 74. _____ Campus Life/Student Life
- 75. _____ Campus Ministries
- 76. _____ Child Care
- 77. _____ Counseling Services
- 78. _____ Community Outreach/Volunteer Opportunities
- 79. _____ Dining
- 80. _____ Disability Services
- 81. _____ Diversity
- 82. _____ Extracurricular Activities/Student Organizations
- 83. _____ Health Services
- 84. _____ News and Events
- 85. _____ Orientation Information
- 86. _____ Intramural Sports
- 87. _____ Leadership Development
- 88. _____ School Media (Newspaper, Radio, TV)
- 89. _____ Student Rights and Responsibilities
- 90. _____ Student Services and Resources
- 91. _____ Student Profile
- 92. _____ Testimonials