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Symbols for Schools: Types of School Nicknames, How They are Formed, and Implications for Leaders

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Abstract

School nicknames are powerful symbols representing the shared values and culture of their respective communities. This descriptive mixed method-study attempts to illuminate patterns in current school nicknames and examine ways that school leaders and communities approach changes to their nicknames. Nicknames from 1,108 postsecondary schools were identified and analyzed with mixed methods to form a classification system that was then used to measure relationships between nicknames and school characteristics. A thematic text analysis of institutional nickname descriptions shows that the origins of nicknames vary, both in their inspirations (from presidential committees to sports journalists) and their process of selection (from repeated usage in the community to student votes). The results of the study may serve as a resource for school leaders seeking to change their current school nickname.

Keywords: school symbols, leadership, nicknames, higher education, organizational culture, mascots

Introduction

Almost every high school, college, and university in the United States has a nickname to reference its community of students, faculty, alumni, and athletes who carry affiliation with the institution. These nicknames are often used as a source of pride among community members, as well as inspirational labels for school teams engaged in athletic or academic competitions. Although the use of nicknames has become commonplace when informally referencing different school communities, nicknames are often overlooked as meaningful symbols. However,

nicknames can draw significant attention when they are deemed offensive and questioned for their appropriateness to represent community members.

Symbols can be effective components of school leadership strategies for the purposes of school improvement (Gordon, 1992; Özdilekler et al., 2017). Yet there is very little scholarly research that examines nicknames as symbols for education institutions or considers how these symbols change. The small amounts of research related to school nicknames have primarily focused on the identification of mascots for athletic teams. As Franks (1982) notes, collegiate nicknames have historically been related to their athletic team names and colors. A more recent study by Zeitler (2018) created a taxonomy of team names and mascots for secondary schools that intersects with biological classifications.

This concurrent, mixed-method study explores the formally recognized school nicknames of post-secondary education institutions and the processes used to form or change their nicknames. The results of the analyses contribute to the literature about theories of organizational culture and socio-onomastics through the examination of nicknames as dynamic artifacts, socially constructed to represent school communities. The results will have practical applications by illuminating patterns in current nicknames and ways that school communities and their leaders approach change.

Furthermore, this study is significant because school nicknames, mascots, and their respective imagery have become controversial at many schools, often because of offensive symbolism related to race, ethnicity, or national origins (Nuessel, 1994; Riede, 2001; Spencer, 2008). Several post-secondary and secondary schools have been prompted to change to their nicknames because of concerns from their community members and professional associations (Hofman, 2005; National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2005; Spencer, 2008).

Moreover, the study is timely because many states are moving forward with legislation that will ban nicknames deemed to be racist or offensive (Nieberg, 2021; Wilson, 2021). This paper can serve as a resource for school leaders cultivating a culture of equity in their schools by finding powerful alternatives to outdated nicknames and understanding how other institutions have navigated these changes (Stolp, 1994).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to develop a classification system for understanding the different types of college nicknames, how they can be categorized, and how they are created. The classification system will provide a framework for both researchers and school leaders to apply to nicknames as cultural symbols for school communities. Furthermore, the study examines the different processes used to create school nicknames, which may serve as a resource for school leaders seeking to change their current school nickname.

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1.) What are the different types of school nicknames in post-secondary institutions?
2.) How do the different types of nicknames for post-secondary institutions vary by institutional characteristics (e.g. student enrollment, regional location)?
3.) How do narratives in public-facing documents describe how higher education institutions arrive at their most current nickname?

Literature Review

Schools are complex organizations with cultures and symbols that are both a product of and a representation of their respective communities. The organizational culture of schools includes the shared values, understandings, and sensemaking by community members, which is part of an ongoing, proactive process of reality construction (Morgan, 2006). Symbols play an

important part of a school's culture because they are collectively recognized by the school community, and they capture the imagination to represent a distinctive aspect of the organization (Morgan, 2006; Stone, 2002). A symbol can be anything—an image, word, object, logo or even an event—that stands for or represents something else (Stone, 2002). The symbolism of school nicknames relates with rituals, images, and traditions that embody the culture of schools (Schein, 2010). The use of nicknames sets the identity of community members apart from their neighbors, as well as evokes powerful emotions (Connolly, 2000; Lawson & Philips, 1985; Slowikowski, 1993; Zeitler, 2018). As they apply to sports teams, most fans expect nicknames to express characteristics such as power, speed, heroism, or courage (Nuessel, 1994).

The use of school nicknames and mascots in the United States has a long history with post-secondary institutions and their respective sports teams (Franks, 1982; Nuessel, 1994). Mascots, which are commonly associated with nicknames, have been documented since the early 19th century as people or things that bring luck to players or performers at athletic competitions or other events (Slowikowski, 1993). According to sports historian Rader (2009), the increased involvement of students in athletics during the mid 1800's fostered a transformation of school spirit on college campuses. Accompanying the growth of collegiate sports, especially football, was the use of nicknames and visual symbols to reference athletic teams and their schools (Craswell, 2015; Guiliano, 2015; Nuessel, 1994). The advancement of spectator sports in higher education played a prevailing role in developing college communities socially, through the forging of ties between students, faculty, alumni, administration, and society's upper class (Guiliano, 2015; Rader, 2009). As the school and sports team nicknames were continuously used and associated with the school communities, they became an essential part of a school's identity (Connolly, 2000; Toglia & Harris, 2014).

Because school nicknames are social constructions with meanings that are negotiated, challenged, celebrated, and sometimes rejected by school communities, leaders must be prepared to facilitate the relationship between these symbols and community members. School leaders often inherit their institution's nickname with its history and perceptions by the community. The nickname may be a resource for advancing an agenda, fulfilling a mission, and supporting a positive school culture (Stolp, 1994). Also, the nickname may threaten the organizational culture, or only represent a sub-culture, and fail to express the character of the entire school community (Morgan, 2006; Schein, 2010). As school communities change over time, it is understandable that the shared understanding of its symbols also changes (Morgan, 2006; Schein, 2010).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilizes two theoretical perspectives to address the three research questions. First, the study uses socio-onomastic theory, a subset of the discipline of onomastics, to create a classification system for institutional nicknames. Onomastics is the "study of the origin, history, and use of proper names" (American Name Society, 2024). First defined by Hans Walther in 1971, socio-onomastics includes the study of different variations of proper names within different contexts, while also considering the name bearer, the name giver, and the name user (Ainiala & Östman, 2017). Socio-onomastic theory "takes into account the social, cultural, and situational domains in which names are used" and how they are applied to all types of names, such as commercial names, personal names, or place names (Ainiala & Östman, 2017, p. 2).

The classification system developed for this study focuses on the nickname and does not include the associated logos or mascots. This approach extends from Zeitler's (2018) taxonomy of school athletic team names and mascots by framing the nickname categories around language-based labels and their meanings.

The construct and definition of nicknaming for this study is borrowed from Leslie and Skipper's (1990) work on socio-onomastic theory. In accordance with their three recommendations for future research, this study follows the methodological approach to first, study nicknames and their origins within specific examples; second, analyze data according to proposed classification categories; and third, identify the conditions when the nicknames are used. These recommendations served as a guide for developing a typology of nicknames among higher education institutions.

For the second theoretical perspective, this study utilizes symbolic-interpretive organizational theory to examine how symbolism and imagery are both instruments and products of organizational culture. Symbolic-interpretivism is based on the premise that organizational realities are socially produced from the multiple interpretations of the shared experiences and symbols within the organizational community (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Symbols can be anything that "represents a conscious or an unconscious association with some wider, usually more abstract, concept or meaning" (Hatch, 1993). Language, including nicknames, is an important vehicle for analysis because it is through words that reality is constructed, modified, made sense of, and communicated (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006).

Furthermore, as Morgan (2006) and Stone (2002) elaborate, symbols and images are tools for leaders and managers to use for shaping the culture of an organization. Organizational cultures are woven through a shared system of meaning, where behaviors and images are interpreted to reinforce or reestablish the meaning (Morgan, 2006). As organizational theory is described by Hatch (1993) and Schein (2010), symbols could be anything, including both the artifacts themselves or the ways they are produced through the dynamics of culture. Nicknames are a unique subject for analysis in this regard because they serve as tools for organizational

leaders. They may be used in their existing form or changed to advance a leader's agenda. This study will explore how nicknames reflect organizational subcultures and consider the context for changes to institutional nicknames.

Data

The data set for the classification of nicknames in this study is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) listing of all higher education institutions for Divisions I, II, and III in school year 2020-2021. The data set was provided by the NCAA and included the school's name, nickname, athletic division, status as a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), and status as a private institution. Three of the cases were not academic institutions and did not have nicknames; these were removed from the data set. A total of 162 cases did not have nicknames listed, so the researcher reviewed the official website for each institution and manually imputed the nickname. One institution did not have a nickname (Hollins University) and was removed from the data set. In total there were 1,108 institutions with nicknames included in the final data set.

A second data set used for the analysis was the 2018 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, the most recent data available (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018). This data set included the following additional variables for identifying different types of institutions: Fall 2017 Full-Time Equivalent enrollment (full-time plus one-third part-time), urban-centric locale, residential setting classification, Hispanic Serving Institution, women's colleges and universities, region of the country, combined SAT composite score in the 25th percentile, and ACT composite score in the 25th percentile.

Lastly, information about the academic institutions and their respective nicknames were retrieved from publicly available websites accessible through the Google search engine. The

primary sources for text retrieval were the college or university's official website or athletic website, and school sponsored or affiliated websites, which included alumni associations, blogs, library archives, and school and student news media. Other web-based sources were from nationally affiliated news and sports media, athletic conferences, and athletic fan organizations associated with the school. Where available, the researcher retrieved data from up to three websites to corroborate details, descriptions, and stories. The type of information retrieved from websites verified the formal nickname, information about the creation of a nickname, and descriptions of the intended meaning of nickname.

Although nicknames are often associated with mascots and logos for school athletic teams (Nuessel, 1994), this study only focused on the nickname as the unit for analysis. Only the nickname itself was used because logos and mascots can be changed by the institution without requiring a change to the nickname. This change could also include any associated use of the nickname in school traditions or references to its community members (e.g. school anthem).

Methods

The type of analysis used for this concurrent mixed methods study is extensive and intensive toponymy (Tent, 2015). Extensive toponymy is the study of place names with a large or comprehensive number of cases; this provides breadth and extends the scope of the study. Intensive toponymy refers to the intrinsic strength or fullness of the data collected and analyzed. The extensive toponymy portion of this study utilizes statistical methods to examine the frequency of different types of nicknames and the relationships between these different types and a variety of institutional factors. This descriptive analysis provides a summary of the sample population and is not predictive of a specific outcome, so no hypothesis tests were conducted

(Venkatesh et al., 2023). Intensive toponymy was used to examine documents to illuminate the process used for changing nicknames.

This study employs three modes of inquiry to answer the research questions. First, the researcher followed the guidance of Leslie and Skipper (1990) and Zeitler's (2018) taxonomy of school athletic team nicknames and mascots to develop a categorization and classification system for all school nicknames (Feng et al., 2020). When developing the classification system, nicknames were first categorized according to their root or core term, which was usually a noun. This process created main categories for all nicknames. Next, any nicknames with attributes, such as adjectives, descriptive terms, or virtues, were also classified into separate categories. The researcher did not classify attributes that were part of the noun in the nickname (e.g., River Hawks, Crimson Tide, Great Danes).

Next, the researcher created subcategories within each main category to provide a more specified classification for all nicknames. A total of 32 subcategories were created (see Appendix A). Cases with nicknames that could potentially have multiple meanings were reviewed on the institution's website for more details about the meaning or origins of the nickname. News articles or blogs publicly available on the internet, preferably hosted by the institution, were also used when information was not available on the school website.

The next phase of the study involved a descriptive statistical analysis for the frequency of nicknames by main category, subcategory, and attribute category. These analyses include frequency distributions and measures of the relationship between school variables, such as school enrollment, regional location, and admissions test scores using contingency tables and correlations.

Lastly, the qualitative analysis for research question number three started with the researcher taking a disproportionate stratified sample of nicknames from each of the main categories. The proportions varied from 100% of the smallest four categories to 20% of the largest two categories (People and Fauna). The sampling for each of the two largest categories was equal or greater than the sample size for the third largest category. Schools in the largest two categories were randomly selected through a random number generator in Microsoft Excel. The resulting random selection provided representation from all subcategories except for the subcategories Mythical Figures and Gender. The researcher randomly selected one case from each of these subcategories to allow for a comprehensive sample representing all subcategories. A total of 355 schools and 357 nicknames were part of the stratified sample. [1] A frequency table of nickname categories in the stratified sample can be found in Appendix B.

To collect data for the text analysis, the researcher performed a web search using Google to locate web pages and documents with descriptions of how nicknames were created and formed. The researcher limited the source of the web pages and documents to the official and affiliated websites of the institution, with a very limited exception for sources from local or national news media and college association websites (e.g. Chicago Tribune – Indiana State University Hoosiers, HBCU Library Alliance – University of the District of Columbia Firebirds) that provided supplemental information to the institutionally affiliated websites. Lastly, the researcher also searched within the institution's web pages describing the history and "About Us" menus for the nickname or mascot. These websites and documents were selected because of their credibility, representativeness, authenticity, and meaning (Morgan, 2022). Partial or

[1] Schools with multiple nicknames were included in all sampling. Also, when multiple schools shared a nickname under a formal agreement, the collective group of schools were counted as one school.

complete descriptions about the creation of the current nickname were collected for 241 institutions.

Then, the researcher used thematic text analysis to determine the origins of the most recent version of each institution's nickname. The process began with an extensive review of the text, the creation of an etic coding scheme, identification of patterns, and the categorization and collation of codes (Creswell, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). Lastly, the researcher synthesized the collations of codes into themes by identifying the "significant concepts that link the substantial portions of data together" (Nowell et al., 2017).

Limitations

This study has limitations related to the volume and depth of information available for the text analysis examining how higher education institutions arrived at their most current nickname. Many higher education institutions do not post clear descriptions of the nickname development process. Those that do, often do not have many details of the decision-making process, which may have limited the variety of potential themes that could emerge from more rich stories of nickname creation. Also, some do not identify the authors of the text or the sources of the original story passed down over the years, or the text provided from higher education institutions or the sources of information provided to the media may be biased to tell a story befitting of the school's reputation. This may have limited the number of perspectives on each school's process or made it difficult to ascertain the veracity of a school's story. The researcher attempted to address these limitations by using a robust subsample of cases for analysis. Also, the researcher used data source triangulation when three or more sources were available to review for convergence of information about nickname creation stories (Carter et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013).

Results

Research Question #1: What are the different types of school nicknames in post-secondary education?

A complete list of all categories with definitions can be found in Appendix A. The researcher identified six main categories of post-secondary school nicknames in the data set with 32 nickname sub-categories. Table 1 outlines the frequencies of each nickname category and subcategory. The following is a list of the six main nickname categories with the frequency and percentage of occurrences in parenthesis: Fauna (614, 55.4%), People (333, 30.1%), The Supernatural (67, 6%), Natural Phenomena (61, 5.5%), Coined Terms (23, 2.1%), Inanimate Objects (15, 1.4%). Table 2 shows the frequencies of attributes for nicknames in the sample. A total of 39 institutions had dual nicknames, one for each sex/gender (e.g. Cowboys and Cowgirls). Eight of the institutions were HBCU and 24 were private schools.

Table 1

Frequency of Types of School Member Nicknames for the Total Sample, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Private Higher Education Institutions

Main Category	Subcategory	Total Frequency	HBCU	Private
Fauna		614	38	328
	Wild	508	32	276
	Pets	56	3	29
	Livestock	41	3	18
	Extinct	3	0	2
	Customized	6	0	3
People		333	8	197
	Fighters and Soldiers	105	2	66
	Members of a labor force	82	4	38
	Settlers of a region	63	1	41
	Members of a religion	20	0	20
	Members of a place or region	19	0	6
	Behaviors and Lifestyles	11	0	6
	Indigenous and Native Communities	10	1	3
	Nobility	10	0	9
	Memorialized Institutional Leaders	9	0	7
	Mythical Figures	2	0	0
	Gender	2	0	1
The Supernatural		67	4	39
	Creatures	39	3	22
	Religious	21	1	12
	Figures	6	0	4
	Forces	1	0	1
Natural Phenomena		61	0	42
	Forces of nature	34	0	25
	Colors	13	0	11
	Extra Terrestrial	6	0	3
	Plants	5	0	2
	Geographic Features	3	0	1
Coined Terms		23	1	19
	Modified Institutional Name	17	1	16
	Phrases	3	0	3
	Made up words	3	0	0
Inanimate Objects		15	0	10
	Vehicles	6	0	3
	Weapons	4	0	4
	Tools	2	0	1
	Clothing	3	0	2
Total		1112	51	634

Table 2

Frequency of Types of Attributes to School Member Nicknames for the Total Sample, Historically Black Colleges or Universities, and Private Higher Education Institutions

Attribute	Frequency	HBCU	Private
Color	58	8	37
Aggression	20	0	13
Virtues	2	0	1
Activities	7	0	5
Context	10	1	4
Size	6	1	5
Total	103	10	65

Research Question #2: How do the different types of nicknames for post-secondary institutions vary by the type of institution?

The researcher analyzed the frequencies and correlations for the different types of schools according to the institutional variables. The results for HBCU and private institutions are in Table 1.

The researcher performed a Spearman's rho and Kendall's tau correlation to measure the strength and statistical significance of relationships between the type of nickname by main categories and institutional characteristics for private institutions, HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institution, women's colleges and universities, fall 2017 full-time equivalent enrollment (full-time plus one-third part-time), urban-centric locale (rural vs. large city), residential setting classification, region of the country, combined SAT composite score in the 25th percentile, and ACT composite score in the 25th percentile. Overall, there were few significant relationships and all were very weak ($r<0.1$). The results are displayed in Appendix C.

Research Question #3: How do narratives in public documents describe how higher education institutions arrive at their most current nickname?

The results of the thematic text analysis identified two categories of codes within the nickname development process: 1.) Generating the idea of the nickname, 2.) Deciding upon or

adopting a nickname. The process for creating all nicknames included at least one theme from each of the two categories. None of these themes were mutually exclusive of each other in the process of nickname creation. For example, a school could have a committee that surveyed students for ideas and then made a decision, or narrowed the list of suggestions from the survey to three ideas which were then voted upon by the student body.

Within the first category, Generating the Idea of a Nickname, the four themes were: Solicitations from the School Community, Committees and Task Forces, Influential Leaders in the Community (ex. Lettermen, SGA president, football coach), and Reactions to Athletic Events (written and spoken). The Solicitations of Ideas from the School Community included methods such as surveys, polls, focus groups, contests, and town hall meetings. When Committees and Task Forces were the medium for idea generation, reports would describe the select group as the providers of the ideas, and ideas were then equally represented on a list. Ideas that came from Influential Leaders in the Community were frequently justified with a story or explanation for the reasoning behind the idea. Lastly, the theme for Reactions to Athletic Events were frequently explained with a story. Stories were generally based on a specific sporting event, such as a rivalry football game, and the subsequent reaction by sports journalists.

In the second category of codes, Deciding Upon or Adopting a Nickname, there were three themes identified by the researcher in the nickname formation process: Committees and Task Forces, Voting, and Repeated Usage. Committees and task forces often were employed by institutions and included a variety of members and numbers of participants. These groups would sometimes be portrayed as the sole decision-making body or the provider of a recommendation to a higher level of authority for a final decision of approval, such as the president or board of trustees. Voting by members of the school community often varied by those who were eligible to

vote and the organization managing the voting process. Often, eligible voters were the student body at the time of nickname creation; however, some schools opened the voting process to alumni, staff, and faculty. The voting process itself was operated in many cases by a task force or committee recognized by school administration, student associations, athletic counsels, or the school newspaper.

Lastly, the researcher identified three factors that frequently relate with the formation of nicknames: athletics, sports journalists, and the changed meaning of an existing nickname, so the nickname is a similar term to the previous nickname but has a different meaning than its original usage.

Summary of Results

This study analyzed the different types of nicknames used by post-secondary education institutions to describe their sports teams and school community by applying socio-onomastic theory to create a typology with six main and 32 subcategories. Next, the frequencies and distributions of school nicknames by institutional characteristics were examined to identify how they vary. Lastly, thematic text analysis was used to analyze how post-secondary institutions self-reported the process for creating their own nickname.

The categories of Fauna and People accounted for 85.5% of all nicknames. The remaining four categories each held between 1.4% and 6% of the cases. The analysis of relationships between the type of nickname and the type of higher education institution it represents revealed there is very little or no significant relationship. Furthermore, nicknames are typically created in two stages: first, by a process of generating nickname ideas; and second, by some method of deciding upon the nickname itself. Ideas for nicknames are generated through committees, influential leaders, remarkable reactions to athletic events by observers, or

crowdsourcing from members of the school community. Nickname decisions were made by committees or more widespread voting or adopted through repeated usage by a critical mass of people within the school community.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper provides a framework to understanding school nicknames as symbols for academic institutions and how they vary in both identity and formation across school communities. How school nicknames are crafted and created is a reflection of, or an influence on, the culture of an organization because they have a shared sense of meaning among its members (Morgan, 2006). The creation of school nicknames is an organizational change, which ideally represents a new reflection of a shared sense of meaning about the school community. Furthermore, nicknames should be inspirational to their community members through an added expression of the school culture within the nickname as a symbol.

Nicknames and how they are derived are important because the culture of the organization is preserved when the values, rituals, and norms of the organization remain active, shared, and constant during the process of changing the nickname (Morgan, 2006). This concept is exemplified in a statement made by the chair of the Board of Trustees for Amherst College—and college alumnus—Murphy (2016), when addressing the creation of a new official mascot and its related nickname. The new nickname and mascot replaced the previous unofficial mascot, Lord Jeffs, which was based on a nickname for the founder of the town, Jeffrey Lord Amherst (Amherst College, 2017):

> The aim will be to generate as much engagement as possible, and to find something—something organically associated with Amherst, reflecting our collective history—that we can all rally around. (Murphy, 2016, p. 2)

This explicit description of a mission to engage school community members in a process to search for a symbol with a shared sense of meaning demonstrated an attempt at reaching cultural preservation while establishing an inspirational collective identity.

However, the changing of a school nickname can also be understood as a mechanism used by organizational leaders for leveraging greater changes to both the culture and identity of an organization. Because the culture of the organization is grounded within the minds and emotions of its community members, changing the school's symbols is a lever for changing how the community sees itself (Argyris, 2010; Schein, 2010; Sackman, 1991). The change process is an effort to construct a new reality, which can be very complex. Furthermore, changes to the culture of an organization and its symbols can take a long time, if it ever happens at all (Argyris, 2010). An example of how difficult it can be is illustrated with the Cameron University (2022) Aggies, according to the University's alma mater webpage:

> For more than a century, the name has stuck, but not without a few challenges. In the 1920s, CSSA [Cameron State School of Agriculture] became the "Cowboys" for a couple of years before returning to the Aggie name. Then, in 1968, Cameron administrators wanted us to become the Cardinals as part of our transition to a university … but students would have none of it. As recently as 2003 it was suggested that the Aggie name no longer was an accurate way to describe a Cameron student. The school came unbelievably close to changing the name of its sports team to the Cavalry – until a wise alumnus noted that "it doesn't matter what you call us, we'll always be Aggies." (para. 3)

In this case, the enduring identity of community members as "Aggies" could not be entwined with changes to the academic institution transitioning from a college to a university.

Nor could different administrative leaders, with presumably different leadership styles and methods, foster a community bond with a new moniker.

The themes for generating ideas and selecting nicknames identified in this study illustrated a variety of leadership methods, as well as different relationships between school leaders and their communities. Furthermore, the methods of leadership for the nickname change process also varied widely. In a few scenarios, authority figures enacted a change process with limited engagement or input from community members. Instead, they crafted and/or chose the nicknames. As Heifitz and Laurie (1999) explain, an authority-oriented approach works in cultures that embrace technical fixes to problems. There were a limited number of cases for this type of leadership approach, and they generally involved school administrators, student representatives, or athletic coaches. They occurred when the nickname change was an adjustment to an existing nickname or when the institution or athletic teams were originally founded, and no previous nickname existed. In the situation when an original nickname was created during the founding of a school, it is possible that the culture of the organization was in its early development and key leaders in the school and athletic community were charged with crafting ideas for new symbols, such as a circumstance when the organizational culture was being shaped and constructed by the occupational culture of the school's leaders (Schein, 2015). One example is the naming of Mississippi Valley State University's (2020) Delta Devils, which is a blend of the school's geographic location in the Mississippi Delta and the football coach's input about the weather being "as hot as a devil" during a brainstorming moment with the athletic director (2020). Or, when the Stetson University Board of Trustees named the first football team the Hatters (Stetson University, 2022) in recognition of the business enterprise owned by the chair of the board, who also provided a financial lifeline for the transformation of DeLeland University.

In these two examples, the newly formed athletic teams did not have a prior nickname and a small group of school officials are credited with generating the idea. The moniker decided and declared by the administrating authorities in a relatively short period of time solved the problem of having sports teams without institutional symbols for intercollegiate competition.

On the contrary to an authoritarian leadership approach, several other institutions experienced nickname formation processes that reflected a more organic method, where the change process was motivated and heavily influenced by members of the greater school community. These organic processes demonstrated conditions where the "followers" hold the locus of responsibility for creating or changing a nickname. Community members involved in the process included students, sports enthusiasts, and professors, all of whom had enough connections within the community to allow their ideas to be shared. For example, at Misericordia University, a student athlete who was also editor of the student newspaper editor raised the issue of changing the school nickname. The student's persistence to discuss the issue eventually engaged professors, campus religious leaders, and other students in joining with the proposition (Robinson, 2016).

School cultures that require a more organic process to changing the nickname may see effective results from a contemporary leadership style, where the leader engages dynamic and reciprocal processes between different stakeholders to pursue a common goal (Komives & Dugan, 2010). One example is a servant leadership style, such as when the leader prioritizes the expressed interests of community members and enables them to achieve desired outcomes (Greenleaf, 1977; Komives & Dugan, 2010; Spears, 1995). Servant leadership allows power to be shared among contributors during the decision-making process while supporting the sense of community among its members (Spears, 1995). This approach emphasizes the importance of the

sociological level of leading cultural change in addition to working with individuals to accept and become part of the forthcoming changes (Argyris, 2010). Working across the individual and sociological level can help confirm a sense of commitment among the community members (Argyris, 2010).

Although there were examples of schools with change processes that clearly reflected either an authoritative leadership approach or an organic followership approach, the substantial number of change processes were somewhere in between; it was often a structured process crafted by institutional authorities that created methods for community members to generate ideas and weigh in on decisions. In many cases, a nickname or mascot committee consisted of representatives of the school community who were authorized to solicit ideas and select or recommend a moniker. Representatives were selected through a variety of methods, including committee or task force appointments made by administrators.

All of the factors in the nickname creation process, the tedious and the lively, are indicators of the culture of the organization and how it approaches change (Morgan, 2006). These factors may include who is allowed to have a voice in the process, the timeline for deliberation and decision making, the institutional authority overseeing the process, transparency of the process, and the release or sharing of the outcomes from the change process.

Future research on this topic could be taken in several different directions. First, future studies could investigate the extent that change processes represent the values of a school community. A study of this type could provide greater insight to the relationship between the beliefs and expectations of community members with the type of process the institution employs to change its moniker. This direction could also be extended into an analysis about the stability of a nickname over time and the use of the nickname when referencing the entire school

community. These types of studies would shed light on the effectiveness of a nickname change process to represent the school and its culture. Additionally, an analysis of trends in the categories of nicknames across all institutions over time may reveal which types of nicknames are accepted more widely as appropriate for educational institutions. Lastly, future studies could look at intuitional nicknames that are distinctly separate from the monikers and mascots for their sports teams. Separate symbols within the same institution may indicate the type of relationship athletic programs have with the academic or other institutional identity of the school community.

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Appendix A

Definitions, Descriptions, and Examples of Main Categories, Subcategories and Attributes of School Nicknames[2]

Table A1. Categories and descriptions of school nicknames

Main Category	Subcategory	Definitions, descriptions and examples
People	Indigenous and Native communities	People who are/were indigenous or native to the area, or people who were indigenous to a different area but have an association to the location of the nickname. This also includes references to prominent leaders or figures in native and indigenous communities, as well as terms used as a general reference to indigenous or Native Americans. Examples: Catawba College Catawba Indians, Bradley University Braves, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Fighting Illini.
	Members of a place or region	People who currently live in a certain location or community where the nickname is used. This includes people who are/were indigenous or native to the area, or people who were indigenous to a different area but have an association to the location of the nickname. University of Iowa Hawkeyes, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Islanders, and St. Edward's University Hilltoppers.
	Settlers of a region	People who settled an area, were not indigenous, and are identified by their heritage or ethnic background and not their newly settled location. These nicknames often refer to people of northern European heritage. The namesake is not directly related to a religion or occupation. Examples: New England College Pilgrims, University of Oklahoma Sooners, Cleveland State University Vikings, and University of Louisiana at Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns.
	Members of a religion	People who are identified as members or representatives of an organized religion. These

[2] There is substantial overlap between school nicknames and their mascots; however, this study makes a clear differentiation between the two and only analyzes the words used for nicknames.

		nicknames can also include roles or "rank" within a religious order. Examples: University of Pennsylvania Quakers, Marymount University Saints, and Wake Forest University Deacons.
	Members of a labor force	People labeled for their employment in a certain industry or skilled trade. Employment could be from either legal or illegal activities. Examples: New Mexico State University Aggies, East Tennessee State University Buccaneers, Austin Peay State University Governors, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Vaqueros. *Pirates are included in this category because the intent of their illegal activity is to gain a profit. Musicians and sailors are also included in this category because their skills are used in a trade as a primary method of employment.
	Fighters and Soldiers	People who are labeled by their unique methods of combat, their identity as someone who fights, or their membership in a military or security force. Examples: St. Michael's College Purple Knights, University of Southern California Trojans, and Nicholls State University Colonels.
	Nobility	People who have titles, roles, or hereditary rank as members of a political or social class system, including royalty. This category also includes immediate support personnel for nobility and royalty that bears an occupational title referencing nobility (e.g., Regents). Examples: Heidelberg University Student Princes, Kings College Monarchs, and Kenyon College Lords and Ladies.
	Memorialized Institutional Leaders	Historical leaders of the institution. The name might be used in whole or part/abbreviation. Examples: Mount Holyoke College Lyons, Williams College Ephs, and University of San Francisco Dons.
	Mythical Figures	People who are heroes or characters in myths or fictional stories. Examples: University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Tarzans and University of West Florida Argonauts.
	Behaviors and Lifestyles	People who exhibit behaviors or lifestyles that can be used for identification. (The behaviors or lifestyles do not engage in profiteering, religious practices, athletics, military service or combat with another person.) Examples: Loyola University Chicago Ramblers, University of Idaho Vandals and Southern Arkansas University Muleriders and Lady Muleriders.
	Gender	This category includes people who are labeled only by gender identity. An example is Arkansas Tech University Wonder Boys (for their male team members).
Fauna	Wild	A non-domesticated, non-extinct animal or group of animals. In many cases, the wild animals selected for

		the nickname live within the local habitat or are an exotic predator. Domesticated animals that have become feral are included in this category because of their identification as wild. Examples: Temple University Owls, Greensboro College Pride, and the University of California-Santa Cruz Banana Slugs.
	Pets	Domesticated animals that are specifically bred for companionship or pleasure, often specified by their breed. All domesticated canines are included in this category. Examples: University of Georgia Bulldogs, John Jay College of Criminal Justice Blood Hounds and Thiel College Tomcats.
	Livestock	Domesticated animals used primarily for agriculture, work, or performance that yields a profit or reward. Animals selected for this type of nickname (which includes poultry) may have an affiliation to the type of agricultural practices or industry in a local area. Animals used for racing or fighting are included in this category. Examples: University of Delaware Blue Hens, University of Texas-Austin Longhorn Steers, and Marywood University Pacers.
	Extinct	Any animal known to have once lived on earth, but no longer has any surviving members of the species. Examples: Amherst College Mammoths, Maranatha Baptist University Sabercats, and Purdue University-Fort Wayne Mastodons.
	Customized	This category includes animals whose identities or names were customized, but do not have any supernatural powers. Examples include the Anna Maria College Amcats, Loras College Duhawks, and Rogers State University Hillcats.
The Supernatural	Creatures	Animated, non-human beings with little or no verifiable evidence to prove their existence, currently or historically. Often, supernatural creatures are associated with a myth or tale that explains what they are. Examples: Seton Hall University Griffins, Drexel University Dragons, and St. Louis University Billikens.
	Figures	Beings that resemble humans but have special powers that are not found in the natural world, with little or no verifiable evidence to prove their existence, currently or historically. Similar to supernatural creatures, figures are sometimes associated with a myth or tale that explains who they are and the effects of their superpowers. Examples: Westminster College Titans and Erskine College Flying Fleet.
	Forces	Events, situations, or actions that cannot be explained by science. Sometimes supernatural forces are used to explain a phenomenon or event when logic or science is not sufficient. Also, similar to supernatural creatures

		and figures, supernatural forces are sometimes associated with a myth or tale. Example: Salem College-North Carolina Spirits
	Religious	Figures, creatures, and forces with superhuman powers that can be explained by the beliefs of one or more organized religions. Examples: Emmanuel College Halo, Duke University Blue Devils and University of California-San Diego Tritons.
Natural Phenomena	Forces of nature	Events or displays of energy that occur in the known universe. Forces of nature depicted in nicknames tend to be powerful events related to weather conditions; however, any natural force may fall into this category. Examples: Iowa State University Cyclones, Pepperdine University Waves, University of New England Nor'easters, and the South Nazarene University Crimson Storm.
	Colors	Visible colors on the color spectrum. Examples: Dartmouth College The Big Green, Harvard University Crimson, University of Chicago Maroons and Wellesley College Blue.
	Geographic Features	Natural features found on earth. Examples: California State University - Long Beach The Beach, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania The Rock, and Whitman College Blues (shortened term for the Blue Mountain Range).
	Extraterrestrial	Objects found beyond the earth's atmosphere. Examples: Olivet College Comets, University of Illinois – Springfield Prairie Stars, and Arkansas Tech University Golden Suns (for female team members).
	Flora	Identifiable plants or parts of plants. Examples: The Ohio State University Buckeyes, Indiana State University Sycamores, and Lubbock Christian University Chapparals/Lady Chapparals.
Inanimate Objects	Weapons	Objects used to injure, defeat, or destroy. Examples: Ursuline College Arrows, Chaminade University of Honolulu Silverswords and Gettysburg College Bullets.
	Tools	A device or object that helps complete a task. Example: University of Toledo Rockets, Lasell University Lasers, and University of Massachusetts-Boston Beacons.
	Vehicles	Equipment that carries or transports something. Examples: Purdue University Boilermakers, Concordia College (New York) Clippers, and Newman University Jets.
	Clothing	Any garment or decorative pattern used for a specific type of clothing. Examples: Florida Southern College Moccasins, University of Akron Zips, and Carnegie Mellon University Tartana.

Coined Terms	Phrases	A single word of group of words expressed as a conceptual unit and used in place of a noun Examples: Georgetown Hoyas, California Lutheran University Regals (Female members) and Wells University The Express.
	Invented words	Words that are not part of any language and may be modifications of existing words. Examples: Virginia Polytechnical Institute and State University Hokies and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Blugolds.
	Modified Institutional Name	An abbreviation or adjustment of the institution's actual name. Examples: College of Saint Benedict Bennies, Duquesne University Dukes, and Saint Bonaventure University Bonnies.

Table A2. Attributes of School Nicknames

Attributes	Definitions, descriptions and examples
Color	Any color on the spectrum; Example: The University of Tulsa Golden Hurricanes
Aggression	Terms for fighting, hostility, harmful intentions, or violence; Example: University of Notre Dame Fighting Irish
Virtues	Terms providing praise for outstanding qualities; Example: Immaculata University Mighty Macs
Activities	Actions by an object or creature; Example: Erskine College Flying Fleet
Context	Terms specifying a setting or place; Example: The Pennsylvania State University Nittany Lions
Size	Terms describing how large or small a creature or object appears; Example: Dartmouth College Big Green

Appendix B
Stratified Sampling for the Text Analysis

Main Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Stratified Sample
Fauna		614	126
	Wild	508	103
	Pets	56	12
	Livestock	41	8
	Extinct	3	2
	Customized	6	1
People		333	70
	Fighters and Soldiers	105	26
	Members of a labor force	82	18
	Settlers for a region	63	8
	Members of a religion	20	3
	Members of a place or region	19	5
	Behaviors and Lifestyles	11	2
	Indigenous and Native Communities	10	3
	Nobility	10	1
	Memorialized Institutional Leaders	9	2
	Mythical Figures	2	1
	Gender	2	1
The Supernatural		67	67
	Creatures	39	39
	Religious	21	21
	Figures	6	6
	Forces	1	1
Natural Phenomenon		61	61
	Forces of nature	34	34
	Colors	13	13
	Extra Terrestrial	6	6
	Plants	5	5
	Geographic Features	3	3
Coined Terms		23	23
	Modified Institutional Name	17	17
	Phrases	3	3
	Made up words	3	3
Inanimate Objects		15	15
	Vehicles	6	6
	Weapons	4	4
	Tools	2	2
	Clothing	3	3
Total		1112	357

Appendix C
Spearman's rho correlation of institutional characteristics with the main types of nicknames

Table C1: Correlation coefficients for the main types of nicknames and institutions located in rural areas or large cities

	People	Animals	Supernatural	Natural Phenomena	Objects	Coined Terms
Rural	0.018	0.014	-0.013	-0.031	-0.043	0.031
Large City	-0.038	0.004	0.030	0.021	0.021	-0.008

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table C2: Correlation coefficients for the main types of nicknames and Private Institutions, HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and Women's Colleges

	People	Animals	Supernatural	Natural Phenomena	Objects	Coined Terms
Private	0.028	-.082**	0.006	0.058	0.023	.075*
HBCU	-.069*	.084**	0.017	-0.053	-0.026	-0.002
Women's College	-0.045	-0.028	.080**	0.056	-0.016	0.028
HSI	0.043	0.001	-0.036	-0.016	-0.031	-0.013

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
†No data was available for Tribal Colleges

Table C3: Correlation coefficients for the main types of nicknames and residential classification

	People	Animals	Supernatural	Natural Phenomena	Objects	Coined Terms
Non-residential	-0.019	0.040	-0.037	0.004	0.014	-0.046
Primarily Residential	-0.035	0.011	.059*	-0.013	0.015	-0.010
Highly Residential	0.047	-0.040	-0.035	0.011	-0.024	0.044

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table C4: Correlation coefficients for the main types of nicknames, student enrollment, and admissions assessments

	People	Animals	Supernatural	Natural Phenomena	Objects	Coined Terms
Fall 2017 Full-Time Equivalent enrollment	-0.019	0.036	-0.016	0.026	-0.013	-.065*
Combined SAT composite score in the 25th percentile	0.033	-0.056	-0.034	.075*	0.018	0.021
ACT composite score in the 25th percentile	0.009	-0.052	0.013	.066*	-0.002	0.037

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table C4: Correlation coefficients for the main types of nicknames and region of the United States

	People	Animals	Supernatural	Natural Phenomena	Objects	Coined Terms
New England	-0.007	0.037	-0.033	-0.014	0.013	-0.048
Mid-East	-0.054	0.034	0.034	-0.029	0.029	0.025
Great Lakes	0.034	-.094**	0.014	.089**	.061*	-0.007
Plains	-0.032	0.015	0.018	-0.046	-0.008	.091**
Southeast	0.037	0.006	-0.032	-0.022	-0.032	-0.026
Southwest	0.007	0.017	-0.054	0.043	-0.032	-0.040
Rockies	-0.004	0.009	0.050	-0.041	-0.020	-0.025
Far West	-0.001	-0.008	0.026	0.018	-0.034	0.028

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).