

Identifying Successful Advancement Approaches in Four Catholic Universities: The Effectiveness of the Four Advancement Models of Communication

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Abstract

The current longitudinal study of the most successful Catholic universities in the United States identifies the prevalence of four advancement models of communication that have contributed to make those institutions successful in their philanthropic efforts. While research by Grunig¹ and Kelly² maintained that the two-way symmetrical model of advancement causes an institution to be effective, successful Catholic universities rely mostly on the two-way asymmetrical model of fundraising. However, Catholic universities using the symmetrical model to some degree have shown an increase of their gift contributions. The dominant coalition (or the power control theory) helps to explain why leaders of Catholic universities determine the advancement model(s) their institutions practice. This study calls for further investigation to determine the extent to which leaders of Catholic universities can increase the size of their philanthropic gifts by investing more effort in a two-way communication model, consisting of a balanced interest between the seeker and the donor.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current longitudinal study was to reinvestigate the extent to which four successful Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States use the four models of advancement communication (press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric,

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¹ James Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, ed. James Grunig (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 292.

² Kathleen S. Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 179-192.

two-way symmetrical).³ The study also aimed to identify the model that allows the institutions studied to be most effective in their development endeavors and to determine what the use of one model says about the leadership of the Catholic university. Grunig uses the term *model* to describe a set of values and patterns that characterize the approach taken by leaders involved in such areas as institutional advancement activities.⁴

Institutional advancement encompasses “the area of college and university administration that usually includes development, public relations, and alumni activities (and sometimes also mistakenly includes athletics, admissions, and even placement).”⁵ This study considered only the broad areas of development or advancement, alumni activities, and public relations/communications. In turn, *public relations* is taken interchangeably with “institutional relations,” or communications to encompass areas of broadcast and print media relations, special events, speech writing, electronic media, internal communications, community relations, and marketing. In a previous study of the institutional advancement at private universities in the United States in 2001, Jean-Pierre Bongila examined, among other questions, the impact of public communications on the development activities of those institutions.⁶

The purpose of that study was to analyze the funding strategies that have furthered the advancement of private universities in the United States and to determine the communication models those institutions used to attract donors. Of the seven institutions that participated in the study, five were Catholic universities.⁷ The questionnaire was divided into two main parts. Part I was composed of forty-seven self-reporting questions seeking quantitative data, including the communication approaches the institutions used to attract donors. Part II, which was completed in a thirty-minute interview format, encompassed nine questions that addressed the role of the president and trustees.

³ James Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1984), 13-46.

⁴ Grunig, ed., *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 286.

⁵ James Fisher and James V. Koch, 1996, *Presidential Leadership: Making a Difference* (Phoenix: American Council on Education, Oryx Press, 1996), 171-172.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Bongila, *Funding Strategies for Institutional Advancement of Private Universities in the United States: Applications for African Universities* (Parkland: Dissertation.com, 2003), 3.

⁷ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 100.

The findings of the 2001 research related to the four models of communication in fundraising revealed the following.⁸ Fifteen percent (15%) of the schools indicated that it was important to market the institution's cause through emotional expressions or one-way asymmetric communication. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the institutions emphasized the institution's interest rather than that of the donor, as in a two-way asymmetric communication. Forty-three percent (43%) of the institutions indicated that they mainly used the two-way symmetric model of communication because they sought to reach understanding between the institution and the donor and to respond to the interest of the donor. A brief historical evolution of the four models of advancement communication might shed more light on their current use at Catholic universities.

Four Models of Institutional Advancement

Kelly⁹ used Grunig's¹⁰ theory of public relation models to identify four historical models of advancement communication: press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric. Kelly¹¹ tested the four models in a national survey of 296 fundraisers, all members of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives (NSFRE). The findings provided strong evidence that the press-agentry model of fundraising is most predominantly used today (Mean scores, 9.67), followed by public information (Mean scores, 8.47), two-way symmetric (Mean scores, 7.15) and two-way asymmetric (Mean scores, 6.16). Grunig hypothesized that the two-way symmetrical model of communication highly contributed to make an institution excellent and effective.¹² Bongila, however, examined the funding strategies of five most successful Catholic universities and two major private universities in the United States and their applications for African universities.¹³ The findings revealed that the four models of fundraising communication only moderately accounted for the success of those institutions. Historically, public relations models have passed through stages that resemble the four models of advancement communication. According to Grunig and Hunt, these

⁸ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 129.

⁹ Kathleen S. Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations: A Critical Analysis* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 381-486.

¹⁰ Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 13-46.

¹¹ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 179-192.

¹² Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 292.

¹³ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 1-54.

models have developed from the lower stage (press-agentry) to the most advanced model (two-way symmetric).¹⁴

Press-agentry Model of Advancement

The press-agentry model of advancement is a one-way directional process that involves little listening to the donors. The purpose of the press-agentry/publicity model was to spread the faith of the organization involved by means of propaganda, through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information.¹⁵ Although still based on manipulation of emotions, press-agentry has evolved from being a complete distortion of truth to becoming a set of personal or emotional attachments to an institution's cause.¹⁶

In the press-agentry model of advancement, charitable organizations publicized and staged events such as charity balls, fairs, auctions, debating contests, and theatrical productions. Kelly wrote that the beginnings of the press-agentry model of advancement came in the 1800s.¹⁷ Charitable organizations seeking private gifts added the use of entertainment and lotteries to their techniques for attracting funds. Such techniques, announced through the media of that period, paralleled the press-agentry techniques of public relations as practiced by historical figures such as P.T. Barnum.

Kelly asserted that since its beginnings, the purpose of the press-agentry model of advancement was to propagandize a cause through

¹⁴ Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 22.

¹⁵ James E. Grunig, et al., *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 308.

¹⁶ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 174-175.

Kelly quoted Payton as saying in 1987 "Press-agentry is dependent on emotions to raise money, and truth is not an essential factor"... "Manipulation of emotion for various purposes is practiced on a national and even world-wide scale in our time... Philanthropy[,] after all, is the product of persuasion, not of logical demonstration. The abuses of rhetorical techniques in a good cause are so familiar as to be commonplace" (p.41). There is, however, an evolution in the understanding of press-agentry as shown in this 1990s quote by Kelly of Cutlip: "Use of the emotional rather than the education approach to getting money for popular philanthropy continues, though perhaps not to the same extent as was practiced in the early 1920s... Nonetheless, tearful appeals, such as stories and photographs of pathetically crippled children, continue to be used in much of twentieth century fund raising"(p. 21).

¹⁷ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 387.

messages that were dependent on emotion.¹⁸ The nature of communication for the press-agentry model was estimated to be one-way, from the organization (source) to the public (receiver). Truth was not an essential factor, and communication was based on feelings.

Joel P. Smith, former vice president for development at Stanford University, saw in the current capital campaign strategy a perfect example of the press-agentry model of advancement.¹⁹ Smith challenged the assumption that capital campaigns were virtually essential to a successful advancement program, while Kelly claimed that many institutions of higher education supported Smith's argument.²⁰

Public Information Model of Advancement

Grunig stated that the public information model developed as a reaction against the propaganda of press agents.²¹ The emergence of the public information model came as early as 1853 in New York City.²² In contrast to the previous model, the public information model held to the belief that private gifts could be raised efficiently and with greater morality by disseminating accurate information.

The public information model relied heavily on the "Domino Theory," which, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), maintained that increased communication would lead to increased awareness.²³ In turn, the awareness would lead to positive attitudes and, finally, to positive behavior. The purpose of the public information model was to disseminate information on needs to prospective donors. Donors were prepared to make gifts once they decided to whom they might give.

Like the press-agentry model, the nature of the public information model was always one-way: from the organization (source) to the public (receiver). Practitioners of those two models saw advancement communication as telling, not listening. In contrast to the press-agentry model, however, truth was important in public information. Aside from research on prospective donors and mailing lists, practitioners of both models

¹⁸ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 388.

¹⁹ Joel P. Smith, "Rethinking the traditional capital campaign," in *Handbook for Education Advancement*, ed. F. Pray (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 60-68.

²⁰ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*.

²¹ Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations*, 287-288.

²² Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 392-397.

²³ Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 24-25.

conducted little research.²⁴ They evaluated advancement results by the number of donors who contributed and by the total dollars raised.

Cutlip described how Ivy Lee and Bishop William Lawrence, who became president of the Harvard Alumni Association in 1904, refined the public information model in the early 1900s.²⁵ The renovated public information model was a campaign of publicity and enlightenment of the public, which was based on facts more than on emotion, and depended on a rational, intelligent, and compassionate public. Under Bishop Lawrence who used the public information model, the Harvard campaign of 1904-1905 netted the huge amount of \$2.4 million, and the Wellesley College campaign raised a significant \$2 million ten years later.²⁶ Cutlip explained the real keynote of Bishop Lawrence's success as a money raiser: he spent untold hours securing the right publicity, arranging lists, and writing letters in his own hand. Kelly hypothesized that 15% of all charitable organizations, including two- and four-year colleges, continue to employ this model.

Two-Way Asymmetric Model of Advancement

The nature of the public information model utilized by Harvard was one-way, from the organization to the public. For the practitioners of this model, fundraising/communication amounted to telling, not listening. The unbalanced relation between the seeker and the donor gave way to a new communication model, which Grunig and Hunt identified as two-way asymmetric.²⁷ This model is essentially a two-way unbalanced communication between the institution and the potential donor. Only the interests of the institution, as opposed to those of the donor, are motivating factors. The purpose of the two-way asymmetric model was to scientifically persuade giving. To shape messages that were attractive, practitioners of the two-way asymmetric model of public communication/advancement used research. John Price Jones, a 1902 graduate of Harvard, became well-known for his formulation of the two-way asymmetric model of advancement.²⁸ That strategy held that the publicity must reflect the nature of the institution and that the institution must

²⁴ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 393.

²⁵ Scott Cutlip, *Advancement in the United States: Its Role in America's Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965), 22.

²⁶ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 394.

²⁷ Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 37.

²⁸ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 404.

show donors the reason for giving. According to Kelly, Jones recommended that careful research into the interests and attitudes of larger givers be done so that the most effective appeal could be made with little resistance.²⁹ Jones applied the psychologic technique of placing prestigious volunteer leaders in critical positions to raise funds, rather than using volunteer workers as practiced in the press-agentry. Kelly put forth the hypothesis that 30% of all charitable organizations practiced the two-way asymmetric model. Furthermore, she hypothesized that most colleges and universities, either private or public, and most advancement consultants practiced the two-way asymmetric model of raising funds.³⁰

Historically, as Cutlip noted, the so-called scientific method of raising funds, the two-way asymmetric model, has raised a deepening resentment because of the perception that practitioners of this method exploited the psychology of potential donors. Such resentment began to appear in the mid-1920s³¹ and has grown into a crescendo of criticism of the never-ending list of money appeals.

Two-Way Symmetric Model of Advancement

The goal of the two-way symmetric model of public relations is mutual understanding between the organization and its publics rather than persuasion.³² Unlike the two-way asymmetric model, dialogue, or two-sided communication and mutual understanding, characterize the two-way symmetric model of public relations. Grunig asserted that symmetrical communication is balanced, and it aligns the relationship between the organization and the public.³³ Kelly affirmed that the two-way symmetric model of advancement was a new phenomenon, emerging only in the 1980s.³⁴ Although no leading figure could be associated with this most recent advancement model, the advancement philosophy that Harvard University practiced in the second half of the 1800s under the presidency of Charles Eliot appeared to be the earliest use of the two-way symmetric model.

Eliot believed that the institution should highlight mutual benefits between the institution and potential donors and should emphasize the

²⁹ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 405.

³⁰ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 178.

³¹ Cutlip, *Advancement in the United States*, 173.

³² Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 38.

³³ Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations*, 557.

³⁴ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*, 411.

concept of mutual understanding. For example, President Eliot pointed out to industrialists that a needed laboratory might well yield new knowledge highly useful to their businesses. He also emphasized Harvard's contribution to public service and made clear what was wanted and why it was needed.³⁵

These practices proved fruitful. Indeed, Harvard president Eliot was an extremely successful fundraiser because of his operating principle: donors should express interest before being asked for a gift. Curti and Nash pointed out that gifts of three dormitories and a building for Harvard's law school came without solicitation by Eliot or any of his officers.³⁶ Under his leadership, Harvard's endowment tripled between 1869 and 1878 and tripled again in the next twenty years.³⁷

Communication Approaches of Four Catholic Universities

Methodology

To study the extent to which the four models of advancement communication are used at Catholic universities, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from September 2007 to April 2008 at four Catholic universities previously identified as successful³⁸ by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.³⁹ The four institutions had also previously participated in the study on the funding strategies for institutional advancement of private universities in the United States.⁴⁰ The 2007 study reused the questionnaire from the 2001 research. This article analyzes the level of prevalence of the four models of fundraising communications at Catholic institutions. In addition to the quantitative survey, which was exclusively used in the previous research, the current investigation asked two open-ended questions that specifically addressed the prevalence of the "four models of communications".⁴¹ Of the seven participants in the initial investigation in 2001, one major non-Catholic institution and one Catholic university decided not to participate. Thus,

³⁵ Roderick Curti and Merle R. Nash, *Philanthropy in the Shaping of American Higher Education* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965), 138.

³⁶ Curti and Nash, *Philanthropy*.

³⁷ Kelly, *Fund Raising and Public Relations*.

³⁸ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 23.

³⁹ *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Voluntary Support of Higher Education* (UMI microfilm No 3365, vol. 44, 1998), A. 39.

⁴⁰ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 24.

⁴¹ Jean-Pierre Bongila, Interview Transcription, 2008, 10.

participants in this longitudinal study included a total of nineteen advancement officers representing four Catholic institutions: University of Dayton (OH), Santa Clara University (CA), University of San Francisco (CA), and University of St. Thomas (MN).

Prior to a face-to-face interview meeting, advancement officers of the four Catholic universities were asked to respond to three survey items in the area of communication models. In this quantitative portion of the research, participants were to respond to the following: *What is the main purpose of the fundraising/development approach utilized by your institution in regard to attracting donors? Check the assertion(s) that best characterize how your institution communicates its needs to the public;* and *What are the main characteristics of the advancement research used by your institution? Please rate from 1-4.*

The interview session consisted of open-ended questions to deepen our understanding of the three quantitative questions. The qualitative portion of the research focused on the following interview questions: “Explain the extent to which the four models of communication affect the advancement success of your institution;” and “Describe which of the four identified models of communication does the most to make your institutional advancement effective.”⁴² Advancement incumbents were also asked a more explanatory question such as “Which language do you preferably use to appeal to donors: an emotional language [press-agentry], a language loaded with information or facts [public information], a content that benefits the most to the university [two-way asymmetric] or a language that lays out the donor’s benefits [two-way symmetric]? Which one comes first to your mind?”⁴³ For the sake of confidentiality, the four Catholic institutions are identified as Institution 1 through 4. Descriptive statistics of frequencies and of percentages were employed for quantitative data. Analysis of qualitative data related to public relations/communications explored consistencies among individuals at the same institution.

Findings

Analysis of quantitative data reveals that the four Catholic universities studied use most of the four models of advancement communication as indicated in Table 1 below. The prevalence of the four models of communication show the following mean percentages: press-agentry (41%), public information (18%), two-way asymmetric (45%), and two-way

⁴² Bongila, Interview Transcription, 11.

⁴³ Ibid.

Table 1. Prevalence of four Models of Advancement Communications at four Catholic Universities

Institution	Press-Agentry	Public Information	2-Way-Asymmetric	2-Way Symmetric
Institution 1	42%	8%	42%	8%
Institution 2	40%	20%	40%	—
Institution 3	18%	18%	62%	2%
Institution 4	25%	25%	37%	13%
Mean % of all Institutions	41%	18%	45%	6%

symmetric (6%). The highest user of the press-agentry model is institution 1 (42%), and the highest user of the two-way asymmetric model is institution 3 (62%). All four institutions practice moderately the two-way asymmetric model (45%).

Press-agentry is the second moderately-predominant model of advancement communication at all four Catholic universities. The above findings differ significantly from those of the study conducted in 2001.⁴⁴ In terms of the presence and use of the four models of communication in advancement activities, institutions reported a mean score of 15% for one-way asymmetric communication (press-agentry and public information) in 2001 and 30% in 2007, 71% for two-way asymmetric communication in 2001 and 45% in 2007, and 43% for two-way communication in 2001 and only 6% in 2007.

The discrepancies in these two sets of results may be attributed to the following factors. Seven universities (including Harvard, Stanford and five Catholic institutions) participated in the study conducted in 2001,⁴⁵ whereas only five universities (Stanford and four Catholic universities) took part in the longitudinal study of 2007. Additionally, the findings presented in the current article are those gathered exclusively from the four Catholic universities. More importantly, only survey data pertaining to the four models of communications were collected in 2001. In 2007, however, both survey and interview methods, including open-ended questions, were used to address the four advancement models of communication.⁴⁶ Participants in the most recent study might have also had a better understanding of the communication because of the qualitative nature of data collection.

⁴⁴ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 129.

⁴⁵ Bongila, *Funding Strategies*, 90.

⁴⁶ Bongila, Interview Transcription.

Analysis of qualitative data highlights the consistencies in the interview vocabulary associated with the communication models within and across the institutions. In press-agentry, advancement officers reported that Catholic university presidents see their dining table as a tool to appeal to hearts of the donors or prospective donors. “If the main tool of the carpenter is his hammer, the main tool of a college president is his/her dining room table... the main tool of the writer is his/her pen, the main tool of the university president is his/her home and his/her dining table.”⁴⁷

When asked which modes of expression—emotional, informational, university’s interest, and donor’s interest—made the university reach its dollar goal, one advancement incumbent declared: “I’d say the emotional... I think probably for most people, I would say the emotional piece is one of the first; because you really do want to make a difference. I mean, I think there is a helping others component to that. I think for most people, the facts are probably last in terms of giving... yes, it goes to emotion.”⁴⁸

According to the study’s results, the four Catholic universities use the public information model for 18% of their advancement success. In addition, this study identified the public information model as an important component of fundraising endeavors at Institution 4, representing about 25% of its dollar solicitation strategies. Yet, the public information model remains a one-way directional process of solicitation from the university to the donor. Although it provides an accurate portrayal of the university, the method of enlightening prospective donors loads the institution’s public with magazines, bulletins, mailings, and information in other formats. Below is an example of such public information language: “I think he [the university president] has gotten people in place and really wanted us to get the university’s name in the media nationwide, not just in our local area. So, I think one of the major mechanisms he set up was really just spreading the word so that we’re not a best-kept secret. And, kind of saying look at the great things we’re doing here and making it more open to the media...And, from a public relations stand-point also, you know, you see as various issues come up at Institution 4, the president is usually the spokesperson on behalf of the institution. And then has a real public presence in our publications, in our magazine—he writes a letter each time. So, whether it is print or

⁴⁷ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 32.

⁴⁸ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 34.

the—you know if the electronic media is doing stories about us or even in the community—he often is the University’s representative.”⁴⁹

Institution 3 predominantly utilizes the two-way asymmetric model of advancement (62%) whereas 45% of the advancement incumbents interviewed acknowledge the use of this model. The language used in the two-way asymmetric model of communication has been found loaded with expressions emphasizing exclusively the potential impact of a dollar gift to the university as opposed to serving the interest of both the university and the donor: “The interest for the university is overarching—I mean that’s what annual giving is here for, to try and build that support. But in approaching them [the donors] through solicitations, annual giving encompasses calling, direct mail, email solicitation and then also the student giving program. We look for their interest in order to further the interest of the university.”⁵⁰

No more than six percent (6%) of development officers interviewed engage in the two-way symmetric model of advancement communication characterized by frank dialogue of interdependency between the institution and the donor. In ideal circumstances, the need to donate ought to be voiced by the donors themselves. The following example encapsulates the essence of the two-way symmetric model of communication:

“The gentleman is not a graduate of our university. He is the president of a North American headquarters for a national Asian company. And they are going to spend that money to build a lab for our students to look at advanced robotics. It is a robotics company. So, his contribution is in-kind for \$350,000. Six robots....His interest is in helping the university with that national image that I talked about. He would like us to become a center for robotics knowledge here—where his business is. And he is willing to help us do that because that advances his business, gives him value.”⁵¹

Another mutually beneficial dialogue that fits the classification of the two-way symmetric model of communication is expressed in the following excerpt: “The generous donor says ‘...because after I die, my name will be on this chair or this building and will go on.’ So, they gain some respect and prestige in the community for their generous philanthropy and they gain a little bit of immortality. They also gain some

⁴⁹ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 45-46.

⁵⁰ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 47.

⁵¹ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 57.

inner satisfaction since the gift is successful if it matches up nicely with their [the donors'] interest."⁵²

Leadership Implications for Catholic Universities

The advancement leadership of the four Catholic universities might be understood as members of the *dominant coalition* whose behaviors determine the model(s) of advancement communication their institutions pursue. Thompson first conceptualized the dominant coalition, which advocated that no one person can control an organization.⁵³ As explained by Hage, "the team approach, the variety of specialists, the complexity of the environment, [and] the need for joint decision making make the stamp of one man or woman less and less likely. This is the era of the dominant coalition."⁵⁴

Following Thomson and Hage's framework, Grunig proposed a power-control theory, which holds that the behaviors of an organization are dependent upon the dominant coalition, the people who have power in an organization.⁵⁶ In his extensive research of what constitutes excellent public relations, Grunig advances that the dominant coalition members determine the philosophy of the function and of the model practiced.⁵⁷ Therefore, the two-way symmetric model of communication does the most to make the organization excellent if the dominant coalition of an organization chooses to adopt it. Adoption of this model, according to Grunig, "is the key choice made by effective organizations," and the group controlling the organization decides on the model.

Based on the power-control theory, the way in which the leadership of Catholic universities, members of the dominant coalition, think about institutional advancement (fundraising, development, annual giving, alumni affairs) determines the advancement model the university predominantly uses. Since the Catholic universities in this study use predominantly the two-way asymmetric model, the presidents, board members, and chief advancement officers of those institutions favor the interests

⁵² Bongila, Interview Transcription, 59.

⁵³ James Thompson, *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 140.

⁵⁴ Jerald Hage, *Theories of Organizations: Form, Process and Transformation* (New York: Wiley), 1980, 157-158.

⁵⁵ Deleted in proof.

⁵⁶ Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations*, 24.

⁵⁷ Grunig, *Excellent Public Relations*, 366.

of their institution over those of the donors. The effects remain unbalanced in favor of the seeker.⁵⁸ As recommended by Panas, an advocate of the asymmetric model, leaders of Catholic universities “research their prospect with finite care and painstaking attention.”⁵⁹ They use a marketing style that helps the major donors want to share in the institution’s dream. Like Williams, the dominant coalition of each Catholic university conducts opinion polls to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its university’s reputation: “With that information they can then devise communication strategies to market the institution as they wish the public to see it and influence the public’s behavior toward it.”⁶⁰ As Lord commented, Catholic university leaders find it is essential to listen to the donor. If they can find out what is on the donor’s mind and where the donor is going, they will be in a strong position to share their offering accordingly.⁶¹ They engage in research of donors’ giving habits and financing means, and often evaluate the success of their advancement activities through assessing the dollar amount collected in relation to the cost of fundraising.⁶²

Research conducted by Kelly⁶³ helps explain why Catholic universities practice advancement the way they do. She investigated 295 organizations whose dominant coalition was composed of the CEO (94%), board of trustees/directors (80%), and head of fundraising (63%). Findings revealed a strong correlation between the amount of influence of the dominant coalition and the way fundraising is practiced. However, although the dominant coalition significantly influences the practice of the three asymmetric models (press-agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetric), it exerts little or no significant influence on the symmetric model. Kelly explains these results as follows: “Clearly, the powerful elites who control NSFRE organizations prefer fundraising that is based on principles of persuasion, manipulation, and control of donors, rather than an approach that strives for mutual understanding.”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Grunig, *Excellent Public Relations*, 367.

⁵⁹ Jerold Panas, *Megagifts: Who Gives Them, Who Gets Them* (Chicago: Pluribus Press, 1984), 194.

⁶⁰ Gregory Williams, “Regulators’ New Strategy: Comparing Charities’ Claims to their Accomplishments,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, October 5, (1993): 292.

⁶¹ James G. Lord, *The Raising of Money: Thirty-five Essentials Every Trustee Should Know* (Cleveland: Third Social Work Education), 1993, 11.

⁶² Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 179.

⁶³ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 184-188.

⁶⁴ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 188.

The majority of Catholic universities that participated in this 2007 study acknowledged that the university president set the tone in which fundraising was taking place, followed by the board of trustees and the chief advancement officer or vice-president for development. “The president is the one who articulates the vision and drives the mission and the strategic plan of the university[,] and it’s in that context that we do good fundraising,” said Institution 3.⁶⁵ “However, at the more general level, for example the annual fund or even periodic capital campaign fundraising efforts, much of that climate is created by the board and by our staff members and by alumni leaders.”⁶⁶

This research suggests that the leadership of Catholic universities moderately practices the two-way asymmetric model of communication because “the point is not what communication language we think would make the university more successful, but the point is what strategy works.”⁶⁷ Yet, the two-way asymmetric model works at successful Catholic universities, as does the press-agentry model, which embeds emotional language. These findings, however, confirmed Kelly’s affirmation that the asymmetric models of advancement communication work better for smaller annual giving contributions than for major gifts.⁶⁸ Likewise, her research shows a significant correlation between the two-way symmetric model—emphasizing a mutual interest between the seeker and the donor—and major gifts.

Although Kelly’s findings reveal that the leading coalition of an institution holds no significant influence on the symmetrical model dealing with major donors,⁶⁹ the top leading advancement officers at the four Catholic universities in the current 2007 study, particularly the president, are specifically at the front line of major gifts. The following example makes explicit the role of a Catholic university president and the symmetrical approach s/he utilizes to attract a major dollar gift.

So... our president’s primary responsibility from a fundraising standpoint is to work with our trustees and major donors...it may be between 40-45 people.... And the majority of that group has provided the majority of the initial \$300 million or so for the capital campaign. And the \$60 million donor is one of the trustees as well.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 68.

⁶⁸ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 190.

⁶⁹ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 205.

⁷⁰ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 57.

Institution 4 received the \$60 million pledge from a donor couple who had no previous relationship with that university “other than his having been invited to serve on our board.”⁷¹ Moreover, the donor accepted the invitation to serve on the board only because the university president had built a friendship with him over the previous seven years; they had taken a number of trips together. Most Catholic universities studied incorporate a measure of symmetrical communication in their advancement activities. Coincidentally, institutions practicing the two-way symmetric model have shown a positive trend in their fundraising revenues. Results of the 2007 study show that the totals of dollar gifts to those institutions have slightly increased from fiscal year 2004-2006.⁷² For example, Institution 1 utilizing 8% of symmetric communication in its advancement activities has more than doubled its charitable contribution from \$22 million in 2004 to \$72 million in 2006.⁷³ The two-way symmetric communication represents about 13% of the fundraising language Institution 4 uses. Yet its charitable contribution has increased from \$36 million in 2004 to \$52 million in 2006.⁷⁴ Institution 3 with its 2% of two-way communication has also improved its dollar gifts from \$19 million in 2004 to \$34 million in 2006. However, Institution 2, which does not rely on the two-way symmetrical communication (0%), made a modest gain of \$2 million from 2004-2006.⁷⁵ Asked which of the four models of communications might have furthered their current fundraising success, one institution explained that it relied on a combination of all four models: “So, that information you give—it’s almost a combination of all four [advancement models] because you are trying to make a compelling factual argument that will persuade the donors to invest in your mission or your purpose. And, the information is also to say we can address this problem.”⁷⁶

Although all the institutions studied acknowledged combining the four languages of fundraising, Institution 1 maintained that they have shifted from relying heavily on the institution’s needs (two-way asymmetric) to listening more carefully to and addressing the donors’ wants (two-way symmetric).

⁷¹ Bongila, *Idem*.

⁷² *Charity Navigator*, (2009). <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm> (accessed January 31, 2009).

⁷³ *Charity Navigator*, (2009). <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm> (accessed March 28, 2010).

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ Bongila, Interview Transcription.

Well, to be frank, I think that in the past years we thought more about what we need. But, we're really trying to adjust that thinking because frankly I think in the end, unless you are tuned into what the donor's needs are, you are never really going to maximize the size of the gift. And, I think on the flip side of that coin is—you really have to be careful about taking care of your donors after they've made the gift."⁷⁷ Institution 4 contends that they do better when keeping the donor's interest in mind: "I think we do encourage people to establish scholarships because it's going to help generations to come. I think we do that better—but only if they [potential donors] have an interest in students and in helping students and most everyone does. So I think we have to find where their passion is and, you know, if they were in the school of engineering what they can do to further the school of engineering—what they would be interested in doing to help. So, I think we find out—we communicate what the benefits to them are and, in turn, what the benefits to the university will be."⁷⁸

Advancement mechanisms are complex, and many factors might have influenced the fundraising results of institutions studied. However, one can cautiously consider the findings by Grunig⁷⁹ and Kelly,⁸⁰ which indicate that a symmetrical communication is likely to make an institution effective and "that symmetrical fundraising is responsible for a significant portion of private support raised each year."⁸¹ Because the four Catholic universities rely on major gifts for about 80% of their gift income, this implies that the leadership of those institutions tends to prefer the two-way symmetric model more when raising major gifts. An advancement officer stated: "I do think the most effective way particularly for major gifts is face to face. And, I think the key to motivating them [major donors] to give is listening to them. And, listening to where their passion, their concerns, and where their interests are."⁸²

Therefore, according to power-control theory, advancement leaders of Catholic universities can move their institutions toward symmetrical fundraising only if they are members of the dominant coalition and have been trained in the practice of a two-way symmetrical model of communication.

⁷⁷ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 66.

⁷⁸ Bongila, Interview Transcription, 67.

⁷⁹ Grunig, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*.

⁸⁰ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸² Bongila, Interview Transcription, 68.

Conclusion

This longitudinal investigation has confirmed the persistence of the four models of advancement communications (press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric) at four leading Catholic universities in the United States. A convenient sample of four Catholic universities was appropriate because a study that looks deeply into the characteristics of a very small sample often results in more knowledge than a study that tackles the same problem by collecting only shallow information from a large sample.⁸³ While all these institutions combined more than one model of advancement communications each, some universities emphasize the use of one single model over the others. Although no clear-cut line delineates one advancement model from another, the statistical and linguistic (qualitative) methods used for the purpose of the study allow for a classification of data (factual data and interview expressions) under the four models of communications. In general, the two-way asymmetric model of advancement communications appears to be predominant at all the institutions.

Although several other factors might have contributed to the advancement success of the institutions investigated, this study has shown that the use of the four models of advancement communications might have to do with such success, given particularly the fair reliance on the two-way asymmetric advancement model (mean = 45%). While the emotional language (press-agentry) appears to be the second most frequently used (41%), this study shows some minor relationship between the size of the philanthropic gift raised by an institution and the two-way symmetric model of communication.

The theory of power control helps to explain that the leaders of the four Catholic universities have led their institutions to conduct fundraising efforts mainly through the unbalanced communication model—the two-way asymmetric—because this model has worked so far. However, the leaders of Catholic institutions with most total gift supports (FYE 2004-2006)⁸⁴ have incorporated, to some degree, the two-way communication model in their advancement strategies. In their numerous studies on “excellent public relations and effective organizations” and “effective

⁸³ Walter Borg and Meredith Gall, *Educational Research: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1983), 36-40.

⁸⁴ *Charity Navigator*, (2009).

fund-raising management,” Grunig, Grunig and Dozier,⁸⁵ and Kelly⁸⁶ demonstrate that the two-way symmetric model of communication is likely to make an institution more effective. Further study is needed to safely imply that advancement communication that is based on the balanced interest of both the university and the donor, as described above, may constitute a more successful advancement tool for Catholic universities.

⁸⁵ Grunig, et al., *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations* 1-35.

⁸⁶ Kelly, *Effective Fund-Raising Management*, 182.

