Communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts: An exploratory study of orientation units

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COMMUNICATING THE MEANINGS OF CULTURAL ARTIFACTS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ORIENTATION UNITS

by

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Communicating the Meanings of Cultural Artifacts: An Exploratory Study of Orientation Units

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Understanding the meanings of cultural artifacts on college campuses can provide new students with a way of learning an institution's culture and values. To help communicate the meanings of cultural artifacts, new student orientation is a common activity that provides institutions, particularly orientation units, with an opportunity to acculturate first-year students into a collegiate environment. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how orientation directors and orientation leaders perceive their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities in California. In-depth and focus groups interviews were conducted with participants over the course of two site visits. To explore the extent the meanings of cultural artifacts were addressed, the researcher conducted an analysis of orientation unit documents as well as observations of orientation leader training sessions. In addition to these issues, the researcher explored the categorization of cultural artifacts
along with the messages sent by artifacts to first-year students through the perceptions of the participants and analysis of the additional data sources.

While all of the participants interviewed were able to discuss their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, the orientation leaders tended to have a greater role in and appreciation for the phenomenon than the orientation directors. The orientation leaders identified formal and informal ways in which they communicate the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students attending orientation sessions. Two of the orientation directors identified having active roles in the phenomenon and pointed to their alumni status as influential, while the other two directors perceived their role as passive or non-existent.

The participants acknowledged that physical, behavioral, and verbal artifacts were appropriate categories to describe artifacts at their institutions. Affective artifacts and multiple dimension artifacts were additional categories that emerged in the data. The orientation directors and orientation leaders identified positive messages of inspiration and inclusion and negative messages of intimidation and offensiveness sent by cultural artifacts to first-year students. Implications of these findings for theory, practice, policy, and future research are discussed in the final chapter.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All hail to thee, Rhode Island,
We pledge our faith anew,
While our heroes bring thee honor
With our banner of white and blue.
In truth we owe her much, for she's shown us the way
To achieve and be of service to the world.
So all hail our Alma Mater,
Rhode Island, our guide whate'er we do (University of Rhode Island, 2001, p. 13).

If you attended Rhode Island State College, later known as the University of Rhode Island (URI), these words in the Alma Mater have special meanings. The heroes of the university, the beauty of the campus, the bold blue and light blue school colors, this passage resonates with those who are part of the university community, both past and present. Not all URI students and alums will be able to recite the words of the Alma Mater, but when they hear them, there are special meanings attached. For this alumnus, the words represent pride, honor, memories, and a deep affinity for the school. Other individuals who are familiar with the URI community may attach similar meanings when hearing the Alma Mater.
So how does one come to attach meanings to a song such as a university’s alma mater and other campus cultural artifacts? Is there a process through which this happens? If so, does it happen formally or informally? Who are the individuals involved in the process? Depending on the respondent, there may be multiple answers to these questions. Students may point to personal experiences such as living on campus and attending sporting events as influential in learning the meanings of key campus traditions. Faculty may cite interaction with students as important to educating them about the school’s history. Alumni may reflect on the beauty of a campus during a fall day and an old hang out spot on the quad. Student affairs administrators may suggest involvement in student organizations as a helpful way of attaching meanings to symbols or other cultural artifacts. All of these individuals may be familiar with the same cultural artifacts, and may even attach the same meanings, but how do they begin to attach these meanings?

Cultural artifacts can be described as “the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group with an unfamiliar culture,” (Schein, 2004, p. 25). Kuh and Hall (1993) referred to three categories of cultural artifacts: physical, verbal, and behavioral. Examples (see Figure 1) of cultural artifacts found at colleges and universities include an institution’s physical setting or architecture, traditions or rituals, language, symbols, heroes and heroines, and institutional history, also referred to as saga (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In this study, the researcher explored the roles of orientation directors and orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of campus artifacts to first-year students.
New student orientation is an institution’s effort, usually programs or activities coordinated by orientation units, to help first-year students transition successfully into a collegiate environment (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). This activity also provides institutions, particularly orientation units, with an opportunity to communicate the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. Leading these units are orientation directors, administrators who are primarily responsible for the planning and coordination of new student orientation programs, as well as the training of orientation leaders, undergraduates who work closely with first-year students at orientation sessions.

Background of the Study

Nearly all colleges and universities have characteristic cultural artifacts that are identifiable (Strange & Banning, 2001). The Golden Dome at Notre Dame, the blue football field at Boise State University, the purple banners at New York University, the Ben Franklin statue on the college green at the University of Pennsylvania, the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, the list could go on. Cultural artifacts are visible expressions of an institution’s values and assumptions that contribute to an organization’s culture (Schein, 2004; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The green grass found on a university quadrangle, historic Victorian style buildings, flags boldly waving school
colors, chatter among students walking to class, statues of influential leaders, and students lining up in formation to walk to a football game are all examples of artifacts that may be present on college campuses.

While an institution’s culture consists of various components, cultural artifacts are viable pieces of an organization that are recognizable to members of the campus community (Schein, 2004). Because they are recognizable, cultural artifacts provide researchers with an opportunity to explore a tangible component of an institution’s culture. This is important since researchers have referred to institutional culture as invisible to its inhabitants (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Morgan, 2006). Cultural artifacts are also significant because they can be used to intentionally or unintentionally communicate messages about an institution’s culture (Ott, 1989). Students may be familiar with cultural artifacts and their messages, even if they do not use the term “artifacts” to describe them. To gain insight into how students learn the meanings of cultural artifacts at their institutions, this study focused on the role of orientation directors and orientation leaders since these individuals are among the first points of contact for new students (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005).

Problem Statement

Understanding the meanings of artifacts is important to how members of a campus community make sense of and learn the functions of their culture (Kuh & Hall, 1993). If cultural artifacts are important to learning and understanding one’s culture, what steps do colleges and universities take to introduce the meanings of these things to students? Although cultural artifacts may be prominent, and new student orientation has been cited
as influential to students’ academic success and transition to college (Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff & Nelson, 1987; Fidler & Hunter, 1989), a lack of empirical research exists on the roles of orientation directors and orientation leaders at public universities in transmitting the meanings of them to students. Despite previous studies that have included emphases on the importance of campus culture, rituals, and ceremonies (Kuh et al., 1991; Manning, 2000; Magolda, 2000; 2001; Thornton & Jaeger, 2007), little is known about how the meanings of such traditions are communicated to students and the roles of orientation units, specifically orientation directors and student orientation leaders, have in this process.

Orientation units are responsible for providing programming to first-year students, most notably new student orientation sessions. Led by orientation directors and student orientation leaders, these units are faced with helping new students adapt to life on campus. In addition, students also face learning the culture of the institution. Understanding the culture of the institutions will help students to embrace fully the collegiate experience. Learning the significance of a particular building, or about an influential individual in the institution’s history, or the symbolism of a particular tradition or ritual, are all ways students can start to learn the culture of their institutions. By becoming familiar with key artifacts, first-year students will have a way of learning the institutional culture while adapting to a new environment (Manning & Eaton, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how orientation directors and orientation leaders perceive their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-
year students at four public universities. The study explored five areas: 1) the role of orientation directors in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 2) the role of orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 3) the extent to which meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated in orientation leader training sessions and new student orientations; 4) the extent to which physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts are appropriate classification categories; and 5) the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students.

This study explored these issues using a qualitative multiple case study design consisting of in-depth interviews with orientation directors, focus group interviews with orientation leaders, observations of orientation leader trainings, and document analysis. While a number of individuals on campuses may communicate the meanings of artifacts, this study focused specifically on orientation directors and orientation leaders since they are at the forefront of working with first-year students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the data collection and data analysis for this study:

1) What perceptions do orientation directors have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?

2) What perceptions do orientation leaders have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?

3) To what extent are the meanings of cultural artifacts addressed in orientation leader trainings and new student orientations at four public universities?
4) To what extent are physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts appropriate categories in discussing cultural artifacts at four public universities; are there any additional categories of artifacts?

5) What perceptions do orientation directors and orientation leaders have of the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students at four public universities?

Significance of the Study

Understanding the meanings of cultural artifacts can be influential to how one learns an institution's culture and adapts to a new environment (Manning & Eaton, 1993). Research suggests that how well students fit in with their institution influences retention and student learning (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) suggest that students who are acculturated into their new institutions through orientation and other activities are more likely to be successful. Part of this acculturation process involves learning the meanings of cultural artifacts (Manning & Eaton, 1993). These studies provide a reference point for orientation directors and orientation leaders wishing to incorporate the importance of cultural artifacts in planning future activities, including new student orientation and orientation leader training. Through understanding how the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated, both orientation directors and orientation leaders can make conscious efforts to integrate these findings into their activities. This study explored these issues and contributed to the literature on cultural artifacts found at colleges and universities.
Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in order to study the phenomenon of interest. Since there was limited literature on how the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to new students and the roles of orientation directors and orientation leaders in this process, these assumptions were necessary to explore this topic:

- New student orientation is one of the first activities in which first-year students encounter the cultural artifacts of an institution.
- Orientation directors and student orientation leaders have roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students.
- Orientation directors and student orientation leaders will be aware of the meanings of cultural artifacts at their institutions.
- Public universities that are approximately the same age and located in the same state have established cultural artifacts.

Limitations

Cultural artifacts are likely present at all colleges and universities even if they are not referred to as “artifacts”. Artifacts help make each campus unique and have its own identity. Despite the presence of cultural artifacts, orientation directors and orientation leaders may be unfamiliar with the meanings and messages of artifacts at their institutions. This limitation was addressed through an email dialogue (see Appendix A) prior to conducting campus interviews with the orientation. Approximately two weeks before visiting the institutions, the orientation directors were provided with definitions and examples of cultural artifacts found on college campuses. This dialogue addressed
any confusion or clarification on how cultural artifacts were defined in this study. Prior to conducting the focus group interviews, orientation leaders were provided with similar information via email (see Appendix A).

Another limitation in this study is that the findings are restricted to four universities. The findings from this study should not be generalized to other public universities, orientation directors, or orientation leaders. Other potential limitations of this study are the reliability of the multiple case study design (Merriam, 1998). When visiting multiple sites, it is important to use the same systematic procedures in the data collection and data analysis stages to make sure the researcher is exploring the phenomenon using the same methods at each site. This reliability issue was addressed using a case study protocol (Yin, 2003) which increased the reliability of the study through specifying the procedures, objectives, and rules to be followed when visiting each institution (Yin, 2003). The protocol consisted of the initial emails sent to the orientation directors and orientation leaders, specific questions, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures that were established in advance of the site visits (see Appendix A).

While criteria were established for the selection of institutions and orientation directors in this study, the universities were located in areas that were conveniently accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling is a limitation because it may risk the credibility of the study since there may have been other institutions in geographic areas that would have provided richer information for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Delimitations

This study was delimited using the following parameters:

1) Participants in this study were delimited to orientation directors and orientation leaders;

2) Institutions in this study were delimited to public universities in California;

3) All of the institutions selected had units devoted to serving new students (i.e. First-Year Experience, New Student Programs, or New Student Services);

4) Orientation directors were required to have a minimum of two years experience in the field;

5) Orientation leaders were required to be at least in their second semester at their institutions;

6) This study focused on the perceptions of orientation directors and orientation leaders of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, not all students, at the university.

Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions are provided for clarification purposes of terms used throughout this study:

Affective artifacts: A category of cultural artifacts that encompasses the sentiment expressed by an institution’s architecture, physical setting, traditions or rituals, language, history or saga, and symbols. An example of an affective artifact is an institution’s Alma Mater which may convey special meaning to community members.
Architecture and physical setting: Refers to a physical artifact, which may include campus buildings, campus landmarks, quadrangles, location, and geographic terrain (Thelin & Yankovich, 1987; Strange & Banning, 2001); Benjamin Franklin statue at the University of Pennsylvania is an example of a physical artifact.

Behavioral artifacts: A category of cultural artifacts that encompasses the traditions or rituals students participate in as groups which connect the past of an institution to the present (Masland, 1985). An example of a behavioral artifact at a college campus is Junior Ring Weekend at Providence College. Juniors participate in three full days of activities including a formal dance that culminates in the students receiving class rings.

Cultural artifacts: The tangible expressions of an institution's culture that communicates meanings and messages to members of the campus community (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Kuh et al, 1991; Kuh & Hall, 1993; Manning, 2000).

First-year or new students: Refers to freshman students.

Heroes and heroines: Refers to influential individuals, past or present, who have made major contributions during the lifetime of an institution (Kuh et al., 1991). An example of a hero and heroine are Leland and Jane Stanford, husband and wife, who will forever be linked to Stanford University as its founders.

Institutional or campus culture: The values, beliefs, and assumptions of an institution that shape its character (Kuh & Hall, 1993); Williams College celebrates traditions that are connected with New England culture and history. The college holds a Thanksgiving dinner for students every November consisting of traditional regional foods like clam chowder, cranberries, and lobster.
Institutional history and saga: Refers to an artifact in which key events of an institution’s history including its founding are recorded and expressed to members of the campus community (Clark, 1972). An example of institutional history and saga is the story behind the construction of the Cathedral of Learning building at the University of Pittsburgh. The tower was built in the wake of deep financial struggles facing the school, and several times the construction was almost stopped. A relentless university president and financial support from the local community carried the project to fruition.

Language: Refers to stories, myths, and terms (Schein, 2004; Strange & Banning, 2001) that only members or insiders of the campus community understand. An example of language is University of Rhode Island students and alumni refer to each other as “Rhody Rams.”

Legacy parents: Parents of students who attended the same institutions and are alums.

Members of the campus community: Includes, but is not limited to, administrators, students, staff, faculty, alumni, and other individuals who have an affiliation to the campus.

Multiple meanings: Refers to cultural artifacts that may express more than one meaning to campus community members. An example of an artifact with multiple dimensions is the John Harvard statue found at Harvard University, which can be considered a physical, behavioral, verbal, or affective artifact.

Orientation: An institution’s effort, usually programmatic or activities based intended to help students transition successfully into a collegiate environment (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984).
Orientation directors: Institutional employees who oversee new student orientation units in offices such as New Student Services or First-Year Experience.

Orientation leaders: Undergraduate students who work or volunteer in units such as New Student Programs, New Student Services, or First-Year Experience and serve as student orientation leaders at new student orientation sessions or other activities coordinated by the offices.

Orientation unit: Administrative unit managed by an orientation director, consisting of professional staff, and student orientation leaders, responsible for providing first-year student programming such as new student orientation sessions; also referred to as orientation program and orientation office.

Physical artifacts: A category of cultural artifacts that encompasses an institution's architecture or physical setting which sends nonverbal messages about campus culture (Strange & Banning, 2001). An example of a physical artifact at a college campus is the blue football field at Boise State University, which is recognizable even outside of the campus community.

Public university: A state funded institution of higher education offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Symbols: Refers to physical, verbal, or behavioral artifacts that communicate particular meanings and messages to members of the campus community. An example of a symbol is the Van Wickle Gates at Brown University, a physical structure that serves as an entrance to the campus but also suggests special meaning. While the side entrance of the gates is always open, the center gates are opened only twice a year: Once at the
beginning of the academic year to admit students and then a second time at
Commencement to graduate students.

Traditions and rituals: Refers to behavioral artifacts that institutions use to
communicate its values (Kuh, Whitt, & Shedd, 1987). An example of a tradition and
ritual is the Aggie Bonfire at Texas A&M, an annual on-campus event held to celebrate
rivalry week before the annual football game against the University of Texas at Austin.

Verbal artifacts: A category of cultural artifacts consisting of words and phrases used
by the campus community that have special meanings to members such as “tears of
endearment” (Kuh et al, 1991; p 84). An example of a verbal artifact is the phrase, “The
U”, which members of campus communities use to refer to their universities and sports
teams such as the University of Miami Hurricanes.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction of the study and topic of interest. The chapter
also included: (a) background of the study; (b) problem statement; (c) purpose of the
study, (d) research questions; (e) significance of the study; (f) assumptions; (g)
limitations; (h) delimitations; and (i) definition of key terms. Chapter 2 highlights a
review of literature that provided a basis for this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To provide a basis for the present study, this chapter includes a review of literature on the following areas: (a) a conceptual framework of cultural artifacts; (b) cultural perspectives in higher education; (c) significance of cultural artifacts on college campuses; (d) campus ecology and studies of cultural artifacts; (e) historical context of orientation programs; and (f) first-year students’ experiences. All of these areas relate to the phenomenon of interest in this study.

A Conceptual Framework of Cultural Artifacts

Cultural artifacts on college campuses consist of physical, verbal, and behavioral aspects, which may have meanings to community members (Kuh & Hall, 1993). As noted in Chapter 1, within these categories, several types and examples of cultural artifacts exist (see Figure 1). This conceptual framework is based on these previously identified categories and types of cultural artifacts. Artifacts are what we can “see” about the cultures of an institution and what we are most likely to attend to and identify when we talk about culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Strange and Banning (2001) stated, “Virtually all campuses have some distinctive physical artifacts, usually buildings, landscape features, or various other physical attributes, which mark points of interest on a typical admissions
or orientation tour” (p. 100). Physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts may influence students’ attitudes toward a particular college or university (Banning & Bartels, 1993, 1997; Sturner, 1972, 1973; Banning & Luna, 1992). Regardless of the type of institution, cultural artifacts are likely present. According to Geertz (1973), artifacts are important communicators because they store cultural meanings. This study focused on how these cultural meanings of artifacts were communicated to new students through the perspectives of orientation directors and orientation leaders.

Based on Kuh and Hall’s (1993) categories, a campus setting or architecture is a physical artifact. Kuh and Hall (1993) stated, “an institution’s physical setting, including permanent structures, land as well as the region of the country where a college or university is located, shape its culture” (p. 4). Salve Regina University, a Catholic school chartered in 1934 in Newport, Rhode Island, overlooks miles of New England’s coastline, offering students scenic views from classrooms. Some of those classrooms are housed in former oceanside mansions that the university acquired. These historic buildings and the university’s physical setting contribute to both student life and a commitment to preservation of the campus. According to Salve Regina President Dr. M. Therese Antone,

One of the great legacies of Salve Regina to students and graduates is the wonderful architecture where they live and study. Our campus is a living museum, a learning laboratory of American architectural styles, technical accomplishments, social patterns, and economic history. We value this heritage and we feel a strong sense of responsibility to preserve it for future generations of students, members of the community, and visitors to Newport (Boxler, 2002).
A verbal artifact found on college campuses is the common language spoken between members, both past and present, at an institution. At the University of Rhode Island, students and alums of the institution refer to themselves and address each other as “Rhody Rams.” This originates from the school mascot, a battering ram, which first appeared in 1929 during a football game (Woodward, 2002). A live ram sparked school spirit by appearing at athletic events and, in turn, led to a buzz phrase used by those connected to the university. Enthusiastic students showing their school pride commonly chant “GO RAMS!” at football and basketball games. Even outside of athletic events, alums of the institution use the phrase “GO RAMS!” in conversations with one another or if an individual is wearing clothing with the school’s colors of light blue, white, and navy. Because of the emphasis on the word “Rams”, different offices at the university have focused their marketing materials on this concept. The Development Office has a fundraising campaign titled: “Rhody the Ram Endowment: The Spirit of URI,” which was established to provide financial support for student volunteers on campus who conduct an annual yard sale (Lavallee, 2002). While the meanings of the words “endowment” and “spirit” are apparent to most individuals, unless one attended the school, the phrase “Rhody the Ram” would have no particular meaning. Similar to the campus fight song, this is an example of language expressing a particular message to the campus community that outsiders would not understand.

Another group of artifacts found at universities are traditions and rituals. Every October, at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, students participate in two fall traditions at the school that are centered around the New England autumn season. First, students gather at one of the campus dining halls for Harvest Dinner, a meal of
traditional regional favorites including clam chowder, butternut squash, corn on the cob, and lobster (Williams Admissions Office, 2007). At some point after the dinner, students participate in another campus tradition called “Mountain Day.” “One beautiful Friday morning in October, Williams President Morton Owen Schapiro (lovingly known to Williams students as "Morty"), wakes up, looks out of his window, and declares that the day is just too beautiful to spend indoors. Thus, he cancels all classes and calls for “Mountain Day” in a tradition that dates back to 1830,” (Bush, 2007, p. 1). These October traditions unite students in celebrating the arrival of a New England autumn and campus spirit.

Other more formal rituals at colleges and universities include new student convocation, commencement, and the campus tour (Manning, 2000; Magolda, 2000, 2001; Thornton & Jaeger, 2007). According to Magolda (2001), the campus tour is “one of many formal rituals that transmit the institution’s political, social, environmental, and cultural expectations and norms for prospective members” (p. 2). Although such tours commonly occur prior to students enrolling, and are usually operated by admissions offices, the universities in this study feature a more detailed tour at new student orientation. These tours are typically led by orientation leaders who highlight key buildings and areas that new students need to be familiar with prior to the start of classes.

Other categories of artifacts found on campuses include an institution’s history or saga, symbols, and heroes or heroines. The opening of Stanford University on October 1, 1891, involved all three of these artifacts. After six years of campus construction, the institution’s founders officially announced the school’s opening:
Just before 11 a.m., Leland and Jane Stanford mounted to the stage. As Mr. Stanford unfolded his manuscript and laid it on the large Bible that was open on the stand, Mrs. Stanford linked her left arm in his right and held her parasol to shelter him from the rays of the midday sun. He began in measured phrases: "In the few remarks I am about to make, I speak for Mrs. Stanford, as well as myself, for she has been my active and sympathetic coadjutor and is co-grantor with me in the endowment and establishment of this University" (Stanford University, 2007, para. 8).

The husband and wife tandem was recognized for taking the risk to establish a major university on the west coast. Prior to Stanford, the successful higher education institutions in the United States were predominantly located in the eastern region of the country (Thelin, 2004). The symbolism of the school’s opening demonstrated to the local community that Leland and Jane Stanford were committed to bringing a successful institution to the West and that image lives on today at Stanford.

An example of an affective artifact is the University of Rhode Island’s Alma Mater discussed in Chapter 1. The passage expresses meanings to both current and former student and other individuals in the campus community. The Van Wickle Gates at Brown University is another example of an affective artifact found on a college campus. Tradition has it that students should pass through the Van Wickle gates only twice during their time at the university, once as freshman entering the institution, and as seniors exiting the school. If students pass through these gates more than these two times, a belief exists that they will not graduate from the school (Mitchell, 1993). The administration at Brown fosters this tradition by opening the center gates only three times during the
academic year: for new student convocation, again at the start of the spring semester, and
then at commencement (Mitchell, 1993). Apart from whether students genuinely believe
in this tradition, some students watch their steps when walking on campus and wait to
pass through the gate only after they remove their caps at commencement (Mitchell,
1993).

Although previous literature has referred to these categories and examples of cultural
artifacts found at colleges and universities, there has not been an explicit method of
labeling types of artifacts. For example, when an author writes about the beauty of a
campus and its architecture, they could be labeled as physical artifacts. If the author
implies that the well kept campus and architecture inspires members of the campus
community to interact with one another, this could also be considered a behavioral
artifact. Situations like these warrant the consideration of a category referred to as
“multiple artifacts”. The researcher would also argue for consideration of a category
called “affective artifacts.” In keeping with the above example, suppose the beauty of the
campus and architecture simply inspire sentiment and pride in one’s institution. This may
not necessarily provoke a certain behavior, but it does illicit an emotion, therefore, it
could be considered affective.

While this study explored whether physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were
appropriate in discussing these issues with the orientation directors and orientation
leaders at their universities, the researcher also explored whether any new categories or
examples of cultural artifacts emerged. The findings in regards to these issues will be
presented in Chapter 4 and discussed more in Chapter 5.
Cultural Perspectives in Higher Education

*Anthropological Lens*

Cultural artifacts are often identified as an anthropological concept, but they have also been studied in the disciplines of sociology, linguistics, psychology, and organizational culture (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). An anthropological perspective of culture looks at the concept by using patterns to transmit meanings in symbolic forms from which people develop attitudes and knowledge toward life (Geertz, 1973). Higher education researchers have found this perspective applicable to the study of cultural artifacts on college campuses (Magolda, 2003; Manning, 2000; Kuh, 1993; Kuh et. al., 1991, Tierney, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Through an anthropological lens, researchers have been able to study the roots of rituals and ceremonies that have lasted for decades through spending time with one’s culture (Manning, 2000; Geertz, 1973).

An anthropological approach to culture allows for interpretation of cultural elements such as events, actions, and behaviors (Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983). Interpreting these elements on a college campus can help provide an institution with an in-depth understanding of its culture. Kuh and Hall (1993) suggest that using this approach to understanding higher education institutions and student affairs professionals is helpful, but “is a complex, challenging undertaking that requires an unusual blend of skills and attitudes as well as sensitivity, courage, and awareness” (p. 15). While anthropological research can be considered intrusive, studying human nature and everyday experiences can provide rich insights into an institution’s culture including prominent cultural artifacts (Manning, 2000).
Organizational Culture

Schein (2004) provides an organizational culture perspective of cultural artifacts by describing them as existing at the surface level of one's culture which include “phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group with an unfamiliar culture” (p. 25). An organizational perspective considers cultural artifacts as observable and tangible (Morgan, 2006; Davis, 1984). Despite discernible and human characteristics, cultural artifacts are difficult to interpret partly because they may communicate different meanings to different people (Weick, 1976; Schein, 2004; Sathe, 1985). Similar to the anthropological perspective, higher education researchers have found the organizational culture perspective relevant to the study of cultural artifacts at colleges and universities (Kuh, Whitt, & Shedd, 1987; Tierney, 1988).

While the concept is rooted in several disciplines, culture has increasingly appeared in research studies of organizational behavior (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Saffold, 1988; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). Studies of culture in organizations attempt to capture and interpret these characteristics (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The study of organizational culture facilitates a social interpretation of an organization's actions or behavior (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Smircich, 1983) and a sense of what an organization means to its members (Peterson, Cameron, Jones, Mets, & Ettington, 1986; Smircich, 1983). Understanding the meanings of cultural artifacts is one way members can learn more about their organization and its culture.

According to Sergiovanni and Corbally (1984), “A standard definition of culture would include the system of values, symbols, and shared meanings of a group including the embodiment of these values, symbols, and meanings into material objects and
ritualized practice” (p. viii). The authors further stated, “The ‘stuff’ of culture includes customs and traditions, historical accounts be they mythical or actual, tacit understandings, habits, norms and expectations, common meanings associated with fixed objects and established rites, shared assumptions, and intersubjective meanings” (p. viii). Based on Sergiovanni and Corbally’s definition, the ‘stuff’ of culture in this study is cultural artifacts.

Tierney (1988) provides another perspective on organizational culture in which he noted, “Researchers and practitioners alike often view culture as a new management approach that will not only cure a variety of organizational ills but will serve to explain virtually every event that occurs within an organization” (p. 2). In his work in this area, Tierney (1988) created a framework of six concepts that make up an organization’s culture: 1) environment; 2) mission; 3) socialization; 4) information; 5) strategy; and 6) orientation leadership. When studying an organization, these six areas provide helpful reference points around which organizational culture can be considered.

Peterson and Spencer (1990) offer another framework for studying the culture of organizations, “Culture in organizations possesses three main characteristics: 1) it emphasizes a unique or distinctive character of the organization; 2) it is deeply embedded and enduring; and 3) it is not easily changed” (p. 6). Regardless of their age and institutional type, colleges and universities pride themselves on having a distinct character. Proof of the deeply embedded and enduring impact of the collegiate experience rests with the alumni who give time and money to their institutions (Worth, 2002). Faculty, staff, students, and administrators are well aware that the culture of a particular academic department, group of students, administrative unit, or the institution as a whole
may not be easily understood and may be difficult to change. New college presidents must be aware of this challenge when taking their posts and trying to establish relationships within the campus community (Cook & Lasher, 1996).

Throughout all of these different frameworks and perspectives, Schein (2004) has continued to study organizational culture. Particularly, Schein discusses three levels of culture: 1) artifacts; 2) espoused beliefs and values; and 3) underlying assumptions. While this study concentrates on the first level, artifacts, the two other levels of culture are important in understanding the influence of organizational culture on human behavior. Espoused beliefs are the second level of culture and consist of the values a group desires to have instead of its current set of beliefs. While a group may have a common belief regarding a particular issue, their actions may be different when faced with an actual situation (Argyris & Schon, 1978). The third level, underlying assumptions, are the certain beliefs and values that are implemented and accepted by a group which, in turn, guide and influence behavior. Such assumptions may influence the way group members feel about, perceive, and think about certain things (Argyris, 1976; Argyris & Schon, 1974). Schein (2004) added, “Basic assumptions, like theories-in-use, tend to be nonconfrontable and nondebatable, and hence are extremely difficult to change” (p. 31).

While all three levels are important to understanding organizational culture, Schein (2004) noted that in order for these concepts to have recognizable meanings, they must be congruent. In this study, although the interview questions and observations focused on the first level of culture, it is important that the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the orientation directors and orientation leaders be taken into account.
Academic and Institutional Culture

Other researchers have referenced cultural artifacts within the spectrum of academic and institutional cultures (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bergquist, 1992; Birnbaum, 1988; Chafee & Tierney, 1988). Noting the increasing popularity of studies of culture in organizations, these researchers have identified multiple cultures at colleges and universities. While the studies have focused on academic and institutional culture issues such as leadership and strategy, cultural artifacts have been mentioned. Unlike anthropological and organizational studies however, cultural artifacts have not received much consideration in the research of institutional cultures. This may be attributed to the emphasis placed on the dynamics of the academy in such studies (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008).

Studies of campus culture, sometimes referred to as institutional culture in higher education literature, have encompassed topics such as institutional history, campus traditions, values and assumptions, ceremonies, myths, heroines and heroes, policies and practices, symbols, and interactions among members (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). While relying on definitions from multiple perspectives, the researcher approached cultural artifacts through a campus culture lens since it was most applicable to this study. Chaffee and Tierney (1988) referred to campus culture in a socially constructed context, which in turn shapes the character of higher education institutions (Kuh & Hall, 1993). Strange and Banning (2001) noted that the roots of campus culture are from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and social psychology and is a concept perceptually constructed by group members.
Kuh and Whitt (1988) discussed the uniqueness of colleges and universities in which institutional culture consists of subjective values, assumptions, and beliefs. Kuh and Whitt (1988), along with Morgan (2006), note that colleges and universities have several cultures because of the different groups that comprise the campus, including faculty, students, administrators, and staff members. Despite various attempts to study campus culture, a lack of research exists (Tierney, 1988; Chait, 1982; & Dill, 1982). This lack of research may be attributed to the amount of time required to study an organization’s culture in detail (Schein, 2004).

Outsiders are unable to interpret and understand the meanings of an institution’s culture, as well as the cultural context in which a college or university operates (Kuh & Whitt, 1988), and while outsiders have this difficulty, some researchers suggest that insiders overlook culture because it is ingrained in their lives (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Morgan, 1986). An institution’s culture, although very much a part of participants’ daily lives and values, is overlooked and taken for granted by some because it is woven into their experience (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Morgan, 1986). Banning and Strange (2001) provided an example in which certain features of the campus are taken for granted by insiders. The authors described poorly worded signs as physical artifacts on college campuses that can confuse new students. Strange and Banning (2001) stated, “An Admissions Office sign next to a Graduate School sign at the same entrance location gives a confusing message” (p. 22). New students may be confused by the signage and, in turn, be unsure where to seek the services they require.

Using organizational culture as a framework, scholars have developed and analyzed specific cultures at colleges and universities. Bergquist (1992) addresses four distinct
cultures in higher education: 1) collegial; 2) managerial; 3) developmental; and 4) advocacy. Along with these four cultures, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) added the virtual and tangible cultures. Through interacting with one another, these cultures ultimately shape the character of institutions. Based on this argument, the authors address the importance of faculty, staff, administrators, and students understanding the role of these cultures at their institutions. Case studies were constructed to demonstrate how each culture can contribute to improving institutional orientation leadership, decision making, and interpersonal communication. Ultimately, Bergquist and Pawlak make the case that for colleges and universities to implement successful changes or policies, the individuals at these schools must take all six cultures into account to provide effective orientation leadership to enact such changes.

Building upon Bergquist’s (1992) work, Kezar and Eckel (2002) studied the use of institutional culture in relation to change strategies and processes in higher education at six institutions. While acknowledging that earlier studies of culture focused on its impact on organizational life, Kezar and Eckel noted a lack of research in regards to how culture affects change strategies and processes. Despite this lack of research, Toma, Dubrow, and Hartley (2005) point to the importance and strength of a united institutional culture. Regardless of how an organization’s culture may influence change strategies and processes, Toma, Dubrow, and Hartley were more concerned with the strength of an institution’s culture.

Birnbaum (1988) has also studied colleges and universities as organizations in attempt to understand how they operate. Through the analysis of the collegial, managerial, developmental, and advocacy models of colleges and their operations,
Birnbaum (1988) used the concept of cybernetics to develop a fifth model, which incorporated the best features of each model. Organizational leadership, management, and governance were three key themes addressed in his work, but he analyzed these issues through an organizational theory perspective. The collegial model, political system, and bureaucracy, are three of the models he examines prior to presenting his model of colleges and universities as cybernetic organizations. In this model, Birnbaum argued that institutions have self-correcting controls that provide stability to organizations despite their complexity. Even with human behavior and interaction on a college campus, Birnbaum believed that mechanisms such as organizational rules, regulations, and structures were in place to provide order even in times of turmoil.

Significance of Cultural Artifacts on College Campuses

Due to the tacit nature of cultural artifacts, one may assume that the meanings and messages these objects communicate are easy for new students to understand. This may not, however, be the case for various reasons. New students may be aware of a particular artifact’s presence on campus, but not appreciate its meanings or understand the message it is expressing. For example, new students may be able to identify a statue on campus by its physical presence, but be unaware of what the statue represents to the campus community. First-year Harvard students may walk by the John Harvard statue on campus but be unfamiliar with the history of the statue and what it symbolizes to the institution. Some new students may view the statue as a physical object occupying space that has no particular meanings or message. In time they will come to know that the statue is commonly referred to as “the statue of three lies” because of its inscription, which lists
John Harvard as the founder of the university and the year 1638. The three lies are that 1) the statue is not of John Harvard, but instead of a 19th century Harvard student; 2) John Harvard was not the founder of the university, but instead was a financial contributor to the school; and 3) Harvard was founded in 1636, not 1638 (Harvard Guide, 2005). The issue of why some students understand the significance of the statue and its meanings, while others will see it as nothing more than a large piece of bronze, is the essence of this study.

From a historical perspective on cultural artifacts in higher education, Horowitz (1987) focused on the campus architecture of early women's colleges. She argued that the design of the colleges was not just an architectural issue, but also a symbolic one. These campuses were designed to protect female students and preserve their identities since higher education was traditionally intended to serve male students. In Horwitz's work, the design of the buildings and campuses were physical artifacts, but the symbolism of protection expressed by these buildings also expressed cultural meaning.

Other examples in the early history of colleges and universities in which buildings were symbols occurred during the colonial era. Thelin (2004) discusses the role several historic buildings played during a critical time in the nation's history, the Revolutionary War. Thelin (2004) writes, "Princeton’s Nassau Hall, Brown’s University Hall, Harvard’s Massachusetts Hall, Yale’s Connecticut Hall, and the Wren Building at William and Mary, have become monuments that convey dignity and command respect" (p. 1). The buildings were far more than physical structures that served as hospitals and bunkers for troops during war. To the nation, these buildings expressed a message that these early
institutions were in full support of the pursuit of American independence and became symbols of the conquest.

Recent cases have highlighted the importance of students understanding the meanings of cultural artifacts on college campuses (Jaschik, 1995; Lowery, 2000; Van Der Werf, 2007; Hauser & O’Connor, 2007; Boorstein, 2007; Maxon, 2007). Several colleges and universities have faced crises, challenges, or controversies in which artifacts were involved. Campus incidents involving school symbols, traditions, institutional history, and heroes or heroines have occurred at public universities and while these incidents have brought attention to artifacts at colleges and universities, the publicity has been mostly negative.

In 1995, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, American Indian students complained that the school’s mascot, an Indian Chief, expressed a racially offensive message prompting legal action from the students (Jaschik, 1995). Although campus administrators recognized the students had a valid complaint, the Education Department’s Office of Civil Rights ruled the symbol was protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (Jaschik, 1995). While that office ruled in favor of the university, clearly, this artifact conveyed negative meanings to a particular group of students. If artifacts such as the Illinois mascot are not inclusive of all students, the issue of artifacts expressing potentially negative messages to new students also arises. This case also demonstrates that the same artifacts may communicate different meanings to different students and therefore potentially express conflicting messages. The college mascot symbolized school spirit to one group of students, while representing racial insensitivity to another.
Other incidents involving artifacts on college campuses have been surrounded by controversy, but also tragedy. On November 18, 1999, the Aggie Bonfire tradition at Texas A&M turned disastrous when twelve students died and twenty-seven were injured when a tower of logs collapsed while they were building the bonfire (Lowery, 2000). The tradition consisted of students burning over 5,000 logs in a week that leads up to an annual football game against the school’s rival, the University of Texas at Austin (Van Der Werf, 2007). Similar to traditions at other institutions, the bonfire brought students and alumni together around a common cause. “Bonfire is one of the oldest and most well known of our Aggie traditions. More than any other tradition, it represents the spirit of being an Aggie,” said Bill Kibler, a former bonfire adviser and associate vice president for student affairs at Texas A&M University (Lowery, 2000, p. 25).

While the annual bonfire demonstrated immense student pride on campus, this positive tradition turned tragic during the course of one morning’s events. This is an example of a positive cultural artifact that suddenly expressed a negative message to the campus community. In the weeks and months that followed the incident, the campus mourned. Although the community pulled together and an investigation was conducted, there was blame and finger pointing throughout the campus. A federal district court lawsuit filed by survivors and families of the victims was dismissed and the U.S. Supreme Court supported the lower court findings that the university was not responsible for the deaths. Despite these court battles and the tragedy, the Bonfire tradition still takes place, but it is now held at an off-campus location (Van Der Werf, 2007).

In another tragedy on a college campus, students, staff, and faculty demonstrated the importance of campus language at Virginia Tech University. After a student gunman
killed 33 people during a shooting rampage on campus on April 16, 2007, (Hauser &
O’Connor, 2007), the university community and individuals across the nation
experienced shock, anger, and grief. In addition to the pain and devastation suffered by
the victims, families, and members of the campus community, the deadliest campus
shooting rampage in the nation’s history required an immediate response from the
university. One day following the shooting, as more details emerged about the incident,
the university hosted a memorial convocation honoring the victims. Despite the
circumstances and sorrow surrounding the convocation, speakers and students attending
the event expressed school spirit by wearing orange and maroon clothing and chanting
“We are Virginia Tech!” repeatedly throughout the ceremony (Boorstein, 2007).

During this time of tragedy, several artifacts were featured at the university: Symbols,
heroes and heroines, language, and rituals. Some of these artifacts were already familiar
to students, such as the school colors and fight songs, but during this time of mourning,
other artifacts were established. Stories emerged of heroic faculty members guarding
their classroom doors in attempts to protect students from the campus gunman. Other
stories of heroic students who were shot yet escaped to safety were also reported. These
individuals, along with the 33 victims, will be known as heroes and heroines in the
Virginia Tech community. Students and other members of the campus community relied
on each other while embracing these artifacts to help cope with the loss of their
classmates, colleagues, and loved ones.

While the above cases have provided examples of the importance and influence of
particular artifacts at the respective schools, some artifacts at college campuses are
forgotten or ignored. At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the school newspaper
featured an article about a monument called Valerie Pida Plaza (Maxson, 2007). The plaza was named after Valerie Pida, a cheerleader for the men’s basketball 1990 National Champion Runnin’ Rebels, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease and then passed away. Despite the visibility of the plaza dedicated in her memory, according to Maxson (2007), the physical artifact has been overlooked by members of the university who drive gulf carts, bikes, and cars through the plaza despite a sign that forbids any vehicle from traveling across the monument. Maxson attributed the negligence to “a lack of culture” at the institution since people were unaware that the plaza was a memorial. Although this unawareness may be due to a lack of culture as the author suggests, the issue of how the meanings of this artifact is or is not communicated to new students may be the bigger issue. Perhaps students and other members of the university community are unfamiliar with the significance of the plaza because no one is communicating the meanings and the significance of it.

Even if new students are unfamiliar with Valerie’s story, the past success of the Runnin’ Rebels is still discussed on campus, perhaps partly due to a “sweet” sixteen appearance in the Men’s NCAA Tournament in 2007. Since she was actively involved as a supporter of the team’s championship run, a prominent event in the school’s history, her memory will forever be linked to the university. At orientation, if the plaza was pointed out on a campus tour, and Valerie’s story was told, perhaps the monument would be more than just brick and mortar as Maxson (2007) suggests.
Another component of understanding cultural artifacts on college campuses is the concept of campus ecology (Banning & Kaiser, 1974; Walsh, 1978; Banning, 1980). Strange and Banning (2001) referred to campus ecology as, “A transactional relationship exists between college students and their campus environment; i.e., the students shape the environment and are shaped by it” (p. 201). One example of an environment is physical, one which includes buildings, signs, symbols, and artwork (Banning & Luna, 1992). Banning and others have examined the influence of cultural artifacts in particular environments in the context of issues including student learning, student development, and interpersonal interaction (Banning & Luna, 1992; Banning, 1992; Baird 1976; 1988; Moos 1979; 1986).

While several fields have contributed to the study of campus ecology (Banning, 1980), student personnel scholars have taken a particular interest in the area because of its relevance to student affairs practitioners who are often responsible for creating a welcoming environment that supports student learning. Strange and Banning (2001) examined this issue through exploring the design characteristics of educational settings that were supportive of college students. The authors found three essential characteristics campus environments should provide students: 1) a sense of security and inclusion; 2) mechanisms for involvement; and 3) an experience of community. Based on their findings, the authors argue that college and university planners should use this information when constructing or renovating buildings or other areas of campuses. Interestingly, Strange and Banning (2001) stated,
If postsecondary educators had had access to many of these concepts about
effective educational environments, especially over the past fifty years, a number
of features taken for granted today on many campuses (such as high-rise residence
halls and large theater-style lecture halls) might never have been proposed in the
first place, assuming that student learning is the primary goal (p. xv).

The underlying theme of campus ecology is the complexity and dynamism of college
and university environments and their ability to adapt to changes (Strange & Banning,
2001). Cultural artifacts are parts of these environments and must be considered when
studying such changes. If there is a change in the physical environment of a campus, such
as the renovation of a historic building, how will it affect an organizational unit on
campus? If students are forced to take classes in an old academic building with
classrooms that are not up to date or equipped with the latest technology, how will their
learning be affected? These are the types of questions and examples that campus ecology
was intended to address.

In addition to physical and organizational environments, Strange and Banning (2001)
discuss human aggregate and constructed environments. Both of these types of
environments are centered on human interaction. In human aggregate environments, the
behavior of people is an important influence upon how environments are perceived. For
example, if an academic advisor is friendly and personable when serving a student, the
student may look more favorably on the environment created by the adviser. In
constructed environments, individuals ultimately construct their own realities and
perceptions as to whether they are satisfied with or attracted to a particular environment
(Strange & Banning, 2001). In the above example, while one student may view the
academic advisor as friendly and personable, another student may view the advisor as arrogant and nosy. Constructed environments are created to take into account students different realities on the same subjects.

In a study of cultural artifacts and racial sensitivity, Banning and Luna (1992) explored the role of physical artifacts and the messages they send about Hispanic/Latino culture to the campus community. Using photographs in a method called visual anthropology, the authors looked at how the non-verbal messages of the campus ecology can promote or hinder the efficacy of campus program efforts to assist Hispanic/Latino students. Banning and Luna (1992) explored whether the photographs taken at several colleges and universities captured the celebration of Hispanic culture or portrayed negative stereotypes. Their study revealed that some institutions had features supportive of Hispanic/Latino culture such as campus signs listed in both Spanish and English. Other institutions had negatively represented this culture in murals that depicted Hispanics as laborers or farm workers when the same mural depicted Caucasians as physicians and scientists. The authors concluded that programmatic efforts of colleges and universities that address diversity might be overshadowed or damaged by the nonverbal messages contained in artifacts that depict stereotypes.

In another study of artifacts and culture, Banning and Bartels (1997) explored the messages physical artifacts on college campuses convey to students of color. The types of physical artifacts examined in the study included art, signs, and graffiti. Banning and Bartels (1997) used a taxonomy to illustrate the type of physical artifacts responsible for the message, the multicultural parameters of groups on campus, the content of the message, and its evaluative impact. The content of the messages observed fell into four

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categories: a) messages of belonging; b) messages of safety; c) messages of equality; and d) messages regarding roles. The authors discussed hypothetical examples of the nonverbal messages that come from campus artifacts such as an institution having a trophy case for male athletic teams, but not female teams.

Another example provided by Banning and Bartels (1997) of the nonverbal messages expressed by physical artifacts included a bulletin board in a classroom that highlighted historic figures of the United States, but did not include any African American or other minority representation. Through these examples, the authors demonstrated the intentional and unintentional messages cultural artifacts communicate to the campus community.

Banning and Bartels (1997) argued that physical artifacts are important because of the implicit messages they send to the campus community, particularly students. In the 1970’s, prior to becoming the Community College of Rhode Island, the institution was known as Rhode Island Junior College or RIJC. At the school’s main location, in Warwick, there was a large neon blue sign featuring the school’s name outside the main entrance of the campus. In the early 1980’s, the word “REJECT” was spray painted on the school’s sign in reference to the institution’s abbreviation RIJC and the pronunciation of the word (Rau, 1989). The school was faced with the problem of a physical artifact sending a negative message to the campus community and a larger image problem. Since people before the incident had already referred to the school as “RIJC” or “REJECT”, this act of vandalism reaffirmed a mockery of the college. Regardless of students’ reactions, the graffiti attracted local news coverage as an act of vandalism but also because the sign was commonly known because of its bright blue lettering and visibility.
Historical Context of Orientation Programs

The first orientation program in higher education goes back over 120 years when Boston University offered orientation for new students in 1888 (Mueller, 1961). Early new student orientation programs were held in the summer and led by administrative personnel and faculty members who addressed a variety of academic and social issues students would encounter college (Mueller, 1961; Twale, 1989). Depending on the institution, the length of orientation programs varied from as little as a few days to an entire semester (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1938). In a description of orientation, Mueller (1961) noted,

There are a minimum of days (usually a week, sometimes less) and a maximum of ground to be covered: getting each student settled into his living quarters, psychological and physical testing, vocational and academic advising, briefings on the library, the campus, and the hall codes, the purchasing of texts, mass meetings and group meetings, registration, corridor parties and mixers, and sometimes official ceremonies (p. 223).

Twale (1989) expanded on this description of orientation programs noting that some were basic reading programs used to administer placement exams to find appropriate courses for students, while others addressed tension and anxiety issues for freshman students. Despite being associated with summer, new student orientation has grown to
include yearlong programming activities such as seminars and workshops designed to reinforce the original concepts addressed weeks and months earlier (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005).

Although programming to help new students transition to college increasingly became the responsibility of student affairs personnel (Fincher, 1985), traditionally, faculty had an active role in the planning and operation of orientation programs (Mueller, 1961). Faculty were available to provide advising and counseling to new students in an effort to help them plan long and short-term college goals (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1938). While faculty involvement in orientation was common, student personnel staffs eventually overtook the operation of orientation completely. Presently, faculty members are still actively involved in academic aspects of orientation programs, but not to the extent they once were (Strumpf & Wawrynski, 2000).

Despite the involvement of faculty members in the orientation process, and that some orientation programs are part of academic affairs divisions, 68% of student orientation programs are part of student affairs divisions (Strumpf & Wawrynski, 2000). Common names of orientation programs at four-year institutions include the Office of the First-Year Experience; New Student Orientation; New Student Programs; and New Student Services. According to Mullendore and Abraham (1993), student affairs professionals often lead these programs because of their experience working with individuals throughout multiple units and divisions on campus.

Regardless of the administrative division an orientation program is connected to, a strong emphasis on academic success has been an increasing trend in the orientation field (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). The National Orientation Directors Association (NODA)
has acknowledged that orientation programs are now focused on traditional academic activities such as advising, placement testing, and class scheduling (NODA, 2007). NODA provides regional and national opportunities for orientation directors to attend professional development conferences and workshops with colleagues from other institutions. The mission of the association is focused on providing education, orientation leadership and professional development in the fields of college student orientation, transition and retention (NODA, 2007). The association also encourages orientation directors to establish collaborative relationships within their own institutions with units such as academic advising, financial aid, residential life, and academic departments (Mullendore, 1992).

Long before new student orientation programs moved toward providing academic services, Lloyd-Jones & Smith (1938) cautioned, “A good deal has been written about the various programs of lectures, trips, library excursions, etc., that have been developed in various institutions. It does not seem worth while to dwell on these further” (p. 77). These scholars acknowledged that although such resources as the library were important for students to become familiar with at their institutions, such information would be ignored out of boredom. Lloyd-Jones & Smith (1938) further stated,

It is probably far better to arrange for them to learn about the campus, about its traditions, its geography, its peculiarities, its “who’s who,” in small, informal groups with student orientation leaders, or in friendly conversation with a faculty counselor, where variation in tempo and the opportunity for response whip up attention and interest (p. 77).
Based on their work, Lloyd-Jones and Smith appeared to be warning orientation directors and student leaders to be aware of the importance of welcoming students to the campus community. Most importantly in respect to this study, these scholars stressed the importance of continuing to communicate the meanings of key campus traditions.

Further research on extensive new student orientation programs has revealed that students who attend orientation are more likely to graduate than students who do not attend (Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff & Nelson, 1987; Fidler & Hunter, 1989). The potential link between orientation programs and student retention has been explored by Rode (2000), who noted, “The research on orientation clearly indicates that successful orientation programs have a powerful influence on first-year social and academic integration and, furthermore, that social and academic integration have a significant effect on student persistence and educational attainment” (p. 3).

It is important to note that while orientation may have a positive effect on student persistence by helping students become socially connected and committed to their institutions, other factors such as students’ academic ability and socioeconomic status may be more influential on student persistence rates (Astin, 1993, Tinto, 1993, Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyumek, 1994). The effects of orientation may be difficult to measure due to the varying structure of orientation programs at colleges and universities. For example, some institutions may require an overnight component in which students experience life in a residence hall, while other institutions may require a daylong orientation focused on class registration. These could provide students with two very different orientation experiences, which may or may not influence things such as their persistence or transition to college. While student affairs practitioners are concerned with
student persistence and, therefore, aware of the importance of orientation activities, enrollment management offices are also aware of the importance of increasing student retention and place a great emphasis on orientation (Posner & Rosenberger, 1997).

Even if a definitive impact of successful orientation programs on student persistence and attainment cannot be measured, Mullendore and Banahan (2005) argued the importance of orientation being "a comprehensive process rather than a single event" (p. 394). Instead of a one or two-day event filled with programmatic activities, Mullendore and Banahan (2005) insisted that an orientation program should "be done through a comprehensive, multifaceted orientation process beginning at the time of admission and continuing throughout the entire first year" (p. 391). The authors also noted that orientation directors should refer to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) for establishing proper guidelines for their programs. The literature shows that orientation activities grew from one or two days (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1938) to one week or a semester (Mueller, 1961), and ultimately to an entire academic year (NODA, 2007). Orientation program extensions may be attributed to the research on orientation that has been linked to positive student attainment (Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff & Nelson, 1987; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; Rode, 2000).

The Role of Orientation Directors

While many of these programs rely on undergraduate orientation advisors to serve as peer orientation leaders to incoming students (Sawyer, 1988), most programs have a campus administrator overseeing the operations of new student orientation (NODA, 2007). These individuals are responsible for supervising the orientation program's components including: 1) academic activities; 2) student services; 3) cocurricular and
recreational events; and 4) sessions for special populations (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). While orientation directors are responsible for administrative leadership, they rely on professional support staff and student orientation leaders to carry out comprehensive orientation programs.

Depending on the type of institution and the administrative division in which an orientation program is located, the mission and components of the program may vary; therefore, the role of orientation directors may differ. In this study, all of the orientation programs were located at public universities. Orientation directors are often responsible for making sure their program missions matches the missions of the universities. An example of an orientation program's mission statement at a public university that addresses the four categories of program components identified by Mullendore and Banahan (2005) is at North Carolina State University:

New Student Orientation (NSO) coordinates NC State University's collective efforts to provide programs and services to newly admitted first year and transfer undergraduate students that will facilitate their transition into NC State, prepare them for the institution's educational opportunities, and initiate their integration into the institution's intellectual, cultural, and social climate (North Carolina State New Student Orientation Program, 2008, para. 1).

Orientation directors at public universities have had to become financial managers because of declining state financial support for their programs (Strumpf & Wawrynski, 2000). This has lead to charging fees for attending these events. Such fees may be a controversial issue because as Mullendore and Banahan (2005) pointed out, "Yet fee-based orientation programs may place a hardship on first-year students from
economically disadvantaged backgrounds, so a fee waiver procedure may be needed to help these students” (p. 397).

To assist in the coordination of working with students, professional support staff are heavily relied on (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). Multiple orientation sessions are held over the summer months to welcome thousands of first-years students to the institutions. Prior to summer orientation sessions, the orientation directors use the fall semester to begin recruitment of orientation leaders and then the spring semester for training them. All four universities in this study advertised for orientation leaders, which required, among other things, participation in spring training sessions led by the orientation directors. Along with providing orientation leadership for new student orientation programs, orientation directors work closely with enrollment management and other student affairs offices to increase enrollment and retention at their institutions (Posner & Rosenberger, 1997).

The Role of Orientation Leaders

Orientation leaders are important to institutions since they can influence whether the orientation experience is a success for new students (Sawyer, 1988; NODA, 1992). These students typically lead orientation activities including campus tours, academic advising, and general campus resource support. Posner and Rosenberger (1997) point out that orientation leaders or advisors “can make a difference in how welcome students feel, how they respond to their anxieties, how much fun they have during the orientation, how well their questions are answered, and how much useful information is provided” (p. 47).
Historically, although student affairs personnel and faculty members led orientation programs, sophomores developed active roles in the orientation experience. Mueller (1961) noted,

They are closer to their own experiences as freshmen, their sophistication in campus affairs is gloriously fresh and stimulating, and they will be eager listeners at the briefing sessions. No counselor can restrain the exuberant sophomore from giving too much advice to freshmen on careers, courses, dates, jobs, and anything else that is on his mind, but counselors must nevertheless always try, and try hard (p. 224).

Lloyd-Jones and Smith (1938) also addressed the importance and advantages of using sophomores in orientation programs noting,

Although most institutions still use seniors as counselors, it has been found very advantageous in at least one university to select from the freshman class at the end of the first semester all those freshmen who seem most likely material, to give them a stimulating series of group discussions during the second semester, and to groom them to serve the next year’s incoming class (p. 76).

While others have a role in orientation programs, the relationship between freshman and sophomores becomes a more natural fit for advising and mentorship. Sophomore involvement as peer leaders in new student orientation is beneficial in helping first-year students adjust to a new environment (Branch, Taylor, & Douglas, 2003). This mentor relationship between sophomores and first-year students, ultimately was influential in the development of orientation leader programs.
Depending on the institution, student orientation leaders may receive benefits including stipends, free food, housing, program clothing, and academic credit for training classes (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Pierson & Timmerman, 2000). At other institutions, orientation leaders do not receive any of these benefits and serve programs on a volunteer basis. Regardless of whether orientation leaders are paid for their service or volunteer, Mullendore and Banahan (2005) noted, “In many institutions, the orientation leader position is one of the most prestigious orientation leadership opportunities available to students” (p. 396). Sawyer (1988) previously noted that orientation leaders often became involved with orientation programs because of the opportunities to assist new students in their transition to an institution. These opportunities are appealing to students who want to become orientation leaders:

Orientation leaders must know and understand the standards and values expected of the orientation program. They must have excellent communication skills and knowledge about how the campus functions and what programs and services exist. They should be informed and committed ambassadors for the institutions and should reflect the diversity of their institution’s student population (p. 397).

The process of becoming an orientation leader typically includes submitting an application or receiving a nomination from a faculty member (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005), then interviewing with the orientation director and other members of the professional staff, and then, if accepted, attending training sessions such as seminars or retreats (NODA, 2007). Such training seminars and retreats are usually led by returning orientation leaders and professional staff members from the orientation office (NODA, 2007). The content of the trainings will vary at each institution, and the literature is
unclear if there are any common themes that are taught to the orientation leaders. Furthermore, it is unknown if the trainings feature an emphasis on cultural artifacts at the institutions and, if so, what student orientation leaders are trained to communicate to new students. This study addressed these issues in interviews with both the orientation directors and orientation leaders and through observations of orientation leader trainings.

First-Year Students’ Experiences

The first year of college has proven to be a critical time for students and a critical issue for institutions (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini (2005); Tinto & Goodsell, 1993). First-time college students face social and academic adjustments (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), transition issues that may interfere with students’ ability to achieve success in their new environments. First-year student success was originally defined by Upcraft and Gardner (1989) as, “The successful completion of courses taken in the first year and continuing enrollment into the second year” (p. 8). In more recent work, however, (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005), the authors call for a revised definition of first-year success that encompasses, “1) developing intellectual and academic competence; 2) establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; 3) exploring identity development; 4) deciding on a career; 5) maintaining health and wellness; 6) considering faith and the spiritual dimensions of life; 7) developing multicultural awareness; and 8) developing civic responsibility” (pp. 8-10).

While some of these areas may be introduced at orientation, first-year seminars (Hunter & Linder, 2003) and other institutional efforts have been developed to increase student success in college. These efforts included the creation of residential environments
designed specifically for first-year students (Hill, 2004), the offering of personalized academic advising services (Winston & Sandor, 1994), the development of clustered learning communities (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004) and the establishment of freshman interest groups commonly referred to as FIGS (Smith et al., 2004). With the exception of individualized academic advising, the other efforts place students in cohorts in which they live together on the same floor of a residence hall, or take the same courses together as a group, or both. While some institutions may focus on specific efforts such as personalized academic advising or residential environments, collaborative efforts between institutional units appear to be an increasing trend in serving first-year students (Smith et al., 2004). All of these efforts are intended to help first-year students achieve success and adapt to their new environments.

The establishment of such communities enables first-year students to have linked social and academic experiences. According to Schroeder (2005), students who participated in FIGS at the University of Missouri-Columbia achieved higher grades, retention rates, and graduation rates. In order for these efforts to be successful, Schroeder added, “collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs are important for challenging and supporting first-year student learning and success” (p. 205). The importance of these partnerships have been recognized by student affairs administrators, such as orientation directors, and faculty, at colleges and universities (Kezar, 2003). Such partnerships are essential to creating a linked social and academic experience. The meanings of cultural artifacts are part of this student experience, although, it has not been explored how first-year students learn about these things and the role of orientation units in this process.
In their project involving DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) institutions, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates (2005) noted the importance of teaching new students about an institution’s culture, including key artifacts. The authors also implied the role orientation programs have in engaging students early on “to teach newcomers about campus traditions and rituals and provide other information about how we do things here and what things really mean” (pp. 314-315). Kuh et al. (2005) describe how artifacts such as rituals and traditions can connect students to their institution and each other: “Feelings of belonging help students connect with their peers and the institution, relationships that, in turn, are associated with persistence and satisfaction. Such events also can teach institutional values, including the value placed on academic achievement” (p. 119). Their study sheds light on how institutions communicate what is important to students. Although the role of orientation programs was referenced, the topic was not probed in detail. Nonetheless, their work is important to this study because it is implied that the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated to students; it is just not clear how this happens or who is involved in the process.

Another area of inquiry into the success of first-year students and their college experiences that has received increased attention is student engagement (Kuh, 2003). Student engagement as it relates to student success, involves both student and institutional effort (Boyer, 1987; Astin, 1993). The underlying principle is that for student engagement to occur, a collaborative relationship must be in place between students and their institutions. A first-year student who actively participates in fruitful campus activities will become engaged with and by the institution, which should offer the opportunities for the student to become successful. While student engagement is the
responsibility of institutions, clearly, it is a transactional relationship that students have an active part in establishing and maintaining.

Despite the opportunities for effective student engagement to occur between students and institutions, Kuh (2005) warned that there is a gap between what first-year students actually do in college and what they expected to do in college. Specifically, first-year students do not get involved in as many activities as they indicated they would at the beginning of their college experiences (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). While the implications of that finding may have different meanings for student success, Kuh (2005) noted that an institution “must first understand who its students are, what they are prepared to do academically, and what they expect of the institution and themselves,” (p. 88). The research on student engagement may have implications for orientation programs because of the many activities focused on student expectations and experiences. For example, if an orientation program encourages students to join a student organization as a way of getting involved on campus, it is perhaps also important that the program addresses issues such as the commitment and time required for students to be part of the organization but also successful in their academic courses.

While the literature on first-year students’ experiences addresses important academic, social, and transitional issues, there appears to be a gap in regard to how students learn the values, beliefs, and assumptions of institutions and how this shapes their experiences. While the experiences of first-year students are shaped by their orientation experiences, institutional efforts such as learning communities, FIGS, residential environments, and academic advising, it is unclear if cultural artifacts are involved in the shaping of student experiences.
experiences. Specifically, it is unknown how the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated to first-year students.

Summary

While there have been studies of campus culture, cultural artifacts, orientation programs, and first-year students, there is a gap in the literature about how the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated to new students and how orientation directors and orientation leaders perceive their roles in this process. While there is literature on the importance of acculturating first-year students to their institutions in helping to create a successful transition into the collegiate environment, the roles of orientation directors and orientation leaders in this process are not specifically addressed. The significance of cultural artifacts in relation to this acculturation process needs to be investigated. This study attempted to address these issues by focusing exclusively on the perspectives of orientation directors and orientation leaders. In addition to these concerns, the literature reviewed in this chapter illustrated the importance of first-year students’ experiences as well as a historical perspective of orientation programs and staffs that serve these students and foster their development in college.

Although Kuh and Hall (1993) provide a framework for the study of cultural artifacts, there is no clear labeling process for classifying artifacts into appropriate categories. In addition to this issue, it is possible that other categories besides physical, verbal, and behavioral exist, but have not been clearly established. In this study, the researcher argues that affective artifacts may be a fourth category because of the many symbols on college campuses that may be more accurately described by placing in this group. The researcher
also suggests cultural artifacts that convey multiple meanings warrant further consideration.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 presents the research methods used in this study. To explore the phenomenon of interest, the researcher used a qualitative multiple case study design consisting of in-depth interviews with orientation directors, focus group interviews with orientation leaders, observations of orientation leader trainings, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). A qualitative software program was used to code and assist in the analysis of the data.

This chapter includes (a) restatement of research questions, (b) design of the study, (c) selection of the cases and participants, (d) pilot interviews, (e) data collection, and (f) data analysis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the data collection and analysis for this study:

1) What perceptions do orientation directors have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?

2) What perceptions do orientation leaders have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?
3) To what extent are the meanings of cultural artifacts addressed in orientation leader trainings and new student orientations at four public universities?

4) To what extent are physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts appropriate categories in discussing cultural artifacts at four public universities; Are there any additional categories of artifacts?

5) What perceptions do orientation directors and orientation leaders have of the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students at four public universities?

Design of the Study

Yin’s (2003) case study methodology helped construct the design of the study. Case studies allow for investigating a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life and bounded context (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher explored five areas: 1) the role of orientation directors in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 2) the role of orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 3) the extent to which meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated in orientation leader training sessions and new student orientations; 4) the extent to which physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts are appropriate classification categories; and 5) the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students.

A multiple case design was used because of its ability to provide stronger evidence than single-case designs (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). By exploring the same phenomenon at four universities using the same data collection and data analysis techniques, the researcher was able to assert the reliability of the study (Yin, 2003). By
keeping all of the techniques standardized, the study was more robust (Yin, 2003). The four cases were bounded by institutional type (public universities), region (California), the roles and titles of participants (orientation directors and orientation leaders), and the length of time over which this study was conducted (six months). At the outset of the study, orientation directors' perceptions were the primary unit of analysis (Yin, 2003; Babbie, 2007). After conducting the initial in-depth interviews with the orientation directors, however, it was revealed that orientation leaders played a key role in the phenomenon of interest; therefore, they were added as participants in this study. The emergent nature of a qualitative study (Patton, 2002) led to these additional participants as well as another research questions about student orientation leaders’ perceptions.

The exploratory nature of this study and the phenomenon of interest supported using qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research methods were also used because these techniques were helpful in exploring difficult to measure cultural features of colleges and universities such as artifacts, values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Crowson, 1987; Peterson, 1985; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1988). Additionally, qualitative inquiry allows for in-depth understanding of issues without disrupting the natural setting in which a phenomena occurs (Merriam, 1998). The specific data collection techniques used in this study included in-depth interviews with orientation directors, focus group interviews with orientation leaders, observations of orientation leader trainings, and document analysis.
Selection of the Cases and Participants

A combination of three sampling techniques was used in this study: 1) criterion; 2) convenience; and 3) snowball (Patton, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As Merriam (1998) pointed out, while multiple sampling techniques can be used, case studies require two levels of sampling; the first level required the selection of the cases and the second level required the selection of the participants within in the cases. The sampling criteria used to select the cases included: a) must be a publicly supported university; b) must be in the state of California; c) must be at least 75 years old; d) must have a new student orientation unit; and e) must have at least 15,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. In establishing the criteria and selecting the institutions, it is important to note that the common geographic location and institutional type of the universities allowed the researcher to access the sites readily. Institutions that were at least 75 years old were selected with the premise that these schools had established cultural artifacts that the participants could discuss extensively.

The orientation directors were selected based on the following sampling criteria: a) must oversee new student orientation and other relevant programming; b) must have direct contact working with students; c) must have at least two years of experience in the student orientation field preferably at their present university; and d) must have a master’s degree in student affairs or related field. Based on the interviews with the orientation directors, orientation leaders were identified as potential participants. Essentially, this snowball strategy (Patton, 2001) led to the selection of orientation leaders who could provide rich information on the phenomenon of interest. Three of the
orientation directors were easily able to identify orientation leaders in their programs who would make strong participants in the focus groups.

It is important to note that anonymity was guaranteed to the orientation directors and orientation leaders who participated in this study. While the data collection techniques were not considered harmful or intrusive, one of the orientation directors requested that her identity remain anonymous. Based on this request, it was decided to protect the identities of all participants, including the orientation leaders. Anonymity was realized by providing both the institutions and participants with pseudonyms. In this study, the four orientation directors and schools are referred to as: 1) Erin at Downtown University; 2) Renee at Scholarly University; 3) Andrea at Tech University; and 4) Nicole at Pride University. The orientation leaders are referred to as male or female and their class rank (i.e. male junior).

Pilot Interviews

The questions for the in-depth interviews (see Appendix A) were developed based on a review of new student orientation and cultural artifacts literature; the research questions guiding the study; and feedback from two new student orientation professionals at two public universities. These interview questions were first piloted (Yin, 2003) over the phone with a former orientation director at a public university in the northeast. The phone interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. Although the university and individual did not meet the sampling criteria used for the cases in this study, the feedback provided gave insight that was helpful in the formulation and editing of the in-depth interview questions. Particularly, the former director suggested the responses to the interview
questions could vary depending on whether the orientation directors worked in new student orientation programs that were administratively located in student affairs or academic affairs divisions. Based on his personal experience, he suggested that new student orientation programs in student affairs divisions might be more likely to emphasize the meanings of cultural artifacts than academically focused orientation programs. Three of the four orientation programs in this study were part of student affairs divisions, while one was part of an academic affairs division.

Approximately one week after the phone interview, the researcher piloted the interview questions in-person with an orientation director at a convenient sample university. While this university did not meet the sampling criteria, the orientation director did meet the criteria and had extensive experience working in new student orientation programs at public universities including two schools in California. The interview lasted approximately two hours. Specifically, the director talked about professional development and the importance of the National Orientation directors Association (NODA) to the orientation field. He indicated that almost all orientation directors were members in the association and would have attended training and conference activities at some point in their careers. He also thought that the extent of their involvement in NODA would influence their responses to the interview questions in that they would be able to provide more in-depth information on the issues covered, including communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts.
Data Collection

The primary data collection techniques used in this study consisted of in-depth interviews with orientation directors; focus group interviews with orientation leaders; observations of orientation leader trainings; and document analysis (Merriam, 1998). All of these techniques were used to triangulate the data and provide multiple sources of evidence for this study (Yin, 2003). The orientation director in-depth interview data was collected over the course of a two-day visit at each university in the fall; the orientation leader focus group interview and observation data were collected during a one and a half day visit to each school in the spring.

The researcher used a case study protocol to guide the data collection procedures in this study (Yin, 2003). This protocol, included as Appendix A, provided a standardized list of instructions for collecting and analyzing data that was easily accessible to the researcher (Yin, 2003). The main sections within the protocol included: 1) email messages sent to orientation directors about their participation in the study; 2) in-depth interview questions for orientation directors; 3) focus group interview questions for orientation leaders; 4) observations of orientation leader trainings; and 5) documents to collect.

Fall Visit

In October 2007, the orientation directors were contacted via email for the purpose of describing the study and to invite their participation as noted in the protocol (see Appendix A). Upon their positive responses, a series of email dialogues began with the orientation directors about the study. At this point, arrangements were made for two-day visits in the fall 2007 semester at each of the universities. These visits consisted of two,
approximately 60 minute in-depth interview sessions conducted over the course of two
days with each director, informal meetings with orientation staff members, and informal
campus tours.

In-Depth Interview I

The first in-depth interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed based on
new student orientation literature, the research questions guiding the study, and feedback
from two orientation professionals at public universities. The purpose of the first in-depth
interview was to explore the following: The professional and educational backgrounds of
the orientation directors; the defining values, beliefs, and assumptions at their
universities; their roles and responsibilities as orientation directors; students exposure to
values, beliefs, and assumptions at their institutions; the extent these issues are
communicated to students at orientation; and the qualities of effective orientation
directors. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the orientation directors and
lasted approximately one hour each. All of the interviews were recorded to ensure
accuracy for transcription purposes. A semistructured format was used for the in-depth
interviews because of the flexibility of this approach and because this format is ideal for
exploring new ideas and emerging perspectives during the interviews (Merriam, 1998). A
description and summary of the aims of each question is provided here:

- Question 1 requested the orientation directors to describe their educational and
  work backgrounds and share any other information they felt was appropriate. This
  question was intended to help develop a profile of the participants.
• Questions 2, 3, and 4 explored how the orientation directors viewed their institutions in general as well as the defining values, beliefs, and assumptions at their universities.

• Questions 5, 6, and 7 focused on how the orientation directors viewed their roles and responsibilities in coordinating orientation activities at their institutions.

• Question 8 inquired about the orientation directors’ views on when and how students are first exposed to values, beliefs, and assumptions at their institutions.

• Question 9 focused on the orientation directors’ views on what extent the issues in question 8 are communicated to students at orientation.

• Question 10 requested the orientation directors to describe the qualities of an effective orientation director.

• Question 11 concluded the first interview with the opportunity for the orientation directors to add comments or feedback to any of the issues discussed.

In-Depth Interview II

The second in-depth interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed based on cultural artifacts literature, the research questions guiding the study, and feedback from two orientation professionals at public universities. The purpose of the second interviews was to explore the following: prominent cultural artifacts at their institutions; how and when students learn the meanings of artifacts; to what extent they personally communicate the meanings of artifacts to students; the role of other offices and individuals in communicating the meanings of artifacts to students; and artifacts that expressed positive and negative messages to students.
Similar to the first in-depth interview, the semistructured format of the questions and the locations of the interviews remained the same. The interviews took place on the second day of the site visits. All of the interviews were again recorded to ensure accuracy. Following is a description and summary of the aims of each question:

- Questions 12 and 13 requested the orientation directors to describe the artifacts they felt were most prominent and visible at their institutions.
- Questions 14, 15, and 16 inquired about the orientation directors’ views on how and when students learn the meanings of artifacts at their institutions.
- Question 17 requested the orientation directors to describe what extent they personally in their positions communicate this meanings and question 18 followed with focusing on whether this communication was intentional and unintentional.
- Question 19 focused on how the orientation directors viewed other offices and individuals at their institutions in regards to communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to students.
- Questions 20 and 21 asked the orientation directors to describe and discuss artifacts that expressed positive and negative messages to students at their institutions and their views about whether students were aware of these messages.
- Question 22 concluded the second interview with the opportunity for the orientation directors to add comments or feedback to any of the issues discussed.

**Spring Visit**

Based on interviews with the orientation directors, it was clear that orientation leaders had an important role in relation to the topic of inquiry. The orientation directors suggested that the researcher would have an opportunity to meet and interview their
orientation leaders during the return visits in the spring semester. In January 2008, the researcher planned the return visits to each of the institutions for February 2008. The researcher also sent an email to the orientation leaders inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix A).

In planning the return visits, the researcher inquired as to the possibility of observing orientation leader trainings since this occurred in the spring semester. The spring visits each lasted one and a half days and consisted of focus group interviews with three to ten orientation leaders at each university, observations of student orientation leader trainings, informal meetings with orientation staff members, and opportunities to ask any follow-up questions of the orientation directors.

Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed based on student orientation literature; the research questions guiding the study; feedback from the participants in the pilot interviews; and the feedback from the orientation directors during the in-depth interviews in the fall visits. The focus group interviewing technique gave participants an opportunity to answer the same set of questions concurrently (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The purpose of the focus group interviews was to explore the following: Students descriptions of their institutions; the defining values, beliefs, and assumptions at their universities; reflections of their own orientation experiences; their reasons for becoming orientation leaders; qualities of effective orientation leaders; prominent cultural artifacts at their institutions; the extent artifacts are discussed at orientation both past and present;
and if they personally discuss the meanings of artifacts with new students while working at orientation.

The interviews lasted about one and a half hours each and were conducted in meeting rooms. All of the interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy of responses. Similar to the in-depth interviews, the focus group questions followed a semistructured format (Merriam, 1998). At the start of the interview, the students were told of the purposes of the interview by the researcher and were provided with examples of cultural artifacts found at colleges and universities. Following is a description and summary of the aims of each question:

- Question 1 focused on how students describe their institutions to individuals outside their universities such as friends and family members.
- Question 2 also focused on students' views of their institutions by asking them to describe what is important and valued at their universities.
- Question 3 requested the students to reflect back on their own orientation experience, describe them, and share any memories with the group.
- Question 4 requested the students to describe why they decided to become orientation leaders.
- Question 5 requested the students to describe what the qualities are of an effective orientation leader.
- Questions 6 and 7 focused on the students' descriptions of prominent artifacts at their institutions and how they came to learn the meanings of these artifacts.
- Question 8 asked students to again reflect back to their own orientation experience and try to recall whether any of these artifacts were discussed.
• Question 9 focused on the extent these artifacts are currently discussed at orientation and if they personally discuss them with new students while working at orientation.

• Question 10 requested the orientation leaders to describe and discuss artifacts that expressed positive and negative messages to students at their institutions and their views about whether students were aware of these messages.

• Question 11 concluded the focus group interview with the opportunity for the students to add comments or feedback to any of the issues discussed.

Observations

In addition to focus group interviews, the researcher conducted observations (Spradley, 1980; Merriam, 1998) of student orientation leader trainings. The sessions were typically held in a collaborative format led by a team of professional staff members, orientation leaders, and the orientation directors. Depending on the institution and training, the researcher was introduced to the orientation leaders at the beginning or end of the session. Following the training sessions, there were opportunities to interact with students and discuss the study in more detail. Throughout the sessions, the researcher served in an observer as participant role (Adler & Adler, 1994) which allowed for establishing relationships with the students without directly participating in their activities. Serving in this role also allowed the researcher to record extensive field notes of the observations in a notebook. The field notes were later typed and entered into the researcher’s laptop (see Appendix E). The field notes were also analyzed to determine the extent that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated in the orientation leader trainings.
At Downtown University (DU) and Scholarly University (SU), the trainings were held as part of a weekly, three-credit orientation leadership class offered in the spring semester in which 40 to 50 students participated. At Tech University (TU), about 50 orientation leaders attended trainings on a voluntary bi-monthly basis. At Pride University (PU), the researcher observed a training of a small group of orientation leaders who were learning how to give campus tours to students attending new student orientation.

At each of the institutions, most of the orientation professional staff members, including the orientation directors, were present at each of the trainings. The trainings at DU and SU were held in classrooms; the training at TU was held in a student union ballroom; the training at PU was conducted while touring the campus. The trainings at DU, SU, and TU lasted approximately three hours each while the training at PU was closer to two hours. Immediately following the trainings, the researcher transcribed the written field notes onto a laptop computer (see Appendix E).

Documents Collected

Prior to and during both visits, documents were collected from the four orientation units (see Appendix A) and later analyzed (see Appendix F). Examples of the documents collected from each orientation program included electronic materials from program websites, handbooks distributed to students and/or parents, and orientation leader training syllabi. These materials were useful for capturing precise data such as names, references, and event details (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). More importantly, these documents helped determine if and what cultural artifacts were featured by the orientation programs. In Chapter 4, this is revisited in detail. In addition to determining whether cultural artifacts
were featured, the documents were used to provide another source of evidence along with
the data collected in the in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and observations of
orientation leader trainings. The student and parent orientation handbooks were helpful in
describing activities coordinated by the orientation offices, as well as indicating what
information was presented to new students and parents. Syllabi of orientation leader
trainings also provided insight into information that is taught to students and the topics
that are covered during a semester in which the trainings were offered.

Data Analysis

A constant comparative method of analysis was used to code the data and identify
emerging themes (Creswell, 2007). This method allowed for a thorough analysis of the
data collected from the in-depth interviews with the orientation directors, focus group
interviews with the orientation leaders, and observations of the student orientation leader
trainings. After analyzing each case individually using this method, a cross case synthesis
was conducted to reveal common themes and contrast differences across the cases
(Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software program, was used to aid
in the data analysis process. The program was particularly helpful in coding the data and
creating network views of emerging themes and relationships.

Though this was not a grounded theory study, the constant comparative method was
used to code and analyze the data (Creswell, 2007). Open, axial, and selective coding
(Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to code the data from the in-depth interviews with
orientation directors, the focus group interviews with orientation leaders, the observations
of orientation leader trainings, and the documents collected. Each stage was critical in discussing the emerging findings about the phenomenon of interest in this study.

Open coding, the first stage of the process, involved examining the data line by line and assigning codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This step started the process of conceptualizing and labeling the data collected from all four cases. After assigning initial code words (see Appendix B), categorizing was used to reduce and group the codes around particular concepts. To help analyze these categories, memos were used in which notes were made and questions (i.e. who, when, where, what, how, how much, and why) were posed to each of the categories. The memo process allowed for opening up the data further by exploring the content in each of the categories and creating subcategories.

After the categories and subcategories were established, axial coding was used to establish several main categories within each of the cases (see Appendix B) by linking the data together (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this step, it is important to compare categories with collected data, expand the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and explore variations in the phenomena (Brown, Stevenson, Troiano, & Schnedier, 2002). Once these analytical processes occurred, core categories were chosen across all four cases (see Appendix B).

Following open coding and axial coding, selective coding was the next step in the constant comparative analysis. In this final stage, all of the remaining categories were placed into core categories, which provided the foundation for the findings. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), selective coding is “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116). The core
categories across all four cases pertained to the five research areas (see Appendix B): 1) the role of orientation directors in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 2) the role of orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 3) the extent to which meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated in orientation leader training sessions and new student orientations; 4) the extent to which physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts are appropriate classification categories; and 5) the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students.

Throughout the data analysis process, ATLAS.ti aided in the organization, coding, and categorizing of the data (Creswell, 2007). During the proposal phase of this study, the researcher decided to use ATLAS.ti because qualitative computer programs are useful in helping researchers analyze data more closely and efficiently (Creswell, 2007). Upon transcribing the in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and observation field notes, all of the documents were uploaded into ATLAS.ti. After uploading the documents, the coding process began using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three stages: 1) open coding; 2) axial coding; and 3) selective coding. After coding the data and developing emerging themes (see Appendix B), a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003) was used to examine the data collectively. This synthesis allowed for building a common framework used to compare and contrast the data from each of the individual cases. ATLAS.ti was used to provide network views of relationships between themes found in each of the cases. These networks contributed to creating models illustrating the cross-case analysis findings which are presented in Chapter 5.
To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings of this study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four quality issues were addressed: 1) credibility; 2) transferability; 3) dependability; and 4) confirmability.

- Credibility involved establishing that the findings were plausible based on the data collected from the participants; this entailed multiple readings of the data before starting the analysis.

- Transferability involved whether the findings could be applied outside of this study; since pseudonyms were used for the universities and participants, it was possible that readers would consider the findings applicable to their institutions.

- Dependability involved the quality of the data collection and data analysis techniques, meaning, if this study were to be repeated using the same techniques, the findings would be consistent. Yin’s case study protocol (2003) was useful in addressing the dependability aspect of this study since all of the data collection and analysis procedures were clearly outlined prior to the site visits.

- Confirmability addressed whether the findings were supported by the collected data; this was accomplished through sharing the interview transcripts with the participants for review.

To address all of these issues further, triangulation and member checks were used as two strategies suggested by Merriam (1998). Each of these strategies played an important role in addressing the issues presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Triangulation involved using multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The multiple sources of data and methods used in this study included in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and
document collection. Based on the information gathered from the in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, the data was triangulated by using observations and document analysis. The findings from the multiple sources are presented in Chapter 4 and summarized in Appendix C.

Member checks were used to ensure the accuracy and confirm the participants' interview responses by providing both the orientation directors and student orientation leaders with copies of interview transcripts via email (Merriam, 1998). This technique ensured the credibility of the participants' responses by providing them with the opportunity to read and confirm their responses to the interview questions.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research methodology used in this study. The chapter also included: (a) statement of research questions; (b) design of the study; (c) selection of the cases and participants; (d) pilot interviews; (e) data collection; and (f) data analysis. A qualitative multiple case study design was used because of the exploratory nature of this study and the phenomenon of interest. The multiple case study design consisted of in-depth interviewing with orientation directors, focus group interviewing with orientation leaders, observations of orientation leader trainings, and document analysis. ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software program, was used to code and assist in the analysis of the data. Network views were used to explore the emerging themes and to help create a model illustrating the findings. A cross case analysis was conducted to compare and contrast the individual findings from each case (Merriam, 1998).
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents the findings of four case studies, in chronological order, where the researcher explored how orientation directors and orientation leaders perceive their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. Constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2007) was used to interpret the data collected from the orientation director interviews, orientation leader focus groups, orientation leader training observation field notes, and orientation unit documents. Open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) led to the emerging categories (see Appendix B). Each case study is organized into three main parts: an introduction with a background of the case and supporting documents that were reviewed for analysis, the fall visit in which the orientation director was interviewed, and the spring visit in which the student orientation leaders were interviewed in focus groups and orientation leader trainings were observed by the researcher. Appendix C provides summaries of the key findings from each case in a table.

Case 1: Downtown University

The first institution visited was Downtown University (DU), located in a metropolitan area in Northern California. The school enrolled approximately 30,000 students and
offered both undergraduate and graduate degrees. The freshman class had about 3,000 students and there was an orientation unit responsible for providing first-year student activities and programming, including new student orientation. According to the institution’s website, the university had a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, with 90% of them from California.

DU, founded in the mid 19th century, is among the oldest public universities in the state. An admissions brochure reported that the school was a leader in graduating minority students and one of the top public universities in the west. The university website reported that 80 percent of its alumni lived and worked in the geographic area. The website highlighted alumni who had made significant contributions to their disciplines. Some of these alumni were readily recognized as well known pop culture celebrities and athletes.

The orientation unit was administratively located in the division of student affairs and headed by a full-time director. At the time of this study, there were approximately 40 student orientation leaders. According to the orientation unit’s website, the mission of the program was,

DU is pleased to offer an orientation program designed for freshmen focused on promoting student learning, belonging, engaging, and involvement. This program will help make the transition to college easier for you. DU Orientation is delivered and maintained by Academic Advising and Retention Services and Student Involvement. Both departments are staffed with professional and trained student staff (Orientation unit website, n.d.).
Other documents from the DU orientation unit were collected and analyzed by the researcher (see Appendix F). Prior to visiting campus, the orientation director mailed the researcher an orientation packet that was distributed to all new students. In the packet, a brochure from the orientation office specifically mentioned that orientation leaders instructed new students about DU traditions. The brochure also noted that orientation was mandatory for all new students, that they were able to select from eight overnight orientation sessions held over the summer, and if they did not attend orientation, they would be blocked from registering for courses. The program’s website was also reviewed by the researcher prior to visiting the campus. With the exception of a photo posted of a building with a clock tower and another photo of a new campus library, the website did not reference other cultural artifacts. During the spring visit to DU, the researcher obtained a copy of an orientation leader training syllabus. One of the sessions on the syllabus was devoted to discussing the institution’s history and influential individuals; besides this session, there were no other clear references to cultural artifacts on the syllabus.

Fall Visit

Orientation Director Interviews

In November 2007, the researcher met with Erin, the orientation director at DU. Two in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately an hour, were conducted over the course of two days in her office. At the time of the meetings, the director had five years of professional experience working in orientation programs at different institutions across the country and had been in her current role for approximately one year. While she was
no longer considered a new orientation professional, she was still relatively new to the institution. In many ways, she was still learning the culture, values, and beliefs of DU. She indicated that she was learning more about the student orientation leaders in her program and that there was a transition with some students leaving and others joining the program. Keeping these circumstances in mind, Erin was able to answer all of the interview questions and provide detailed responses.

In creating a profile of her background, Erin described herself as a student affairs practitioner who applied student development theory to her work. Citing her experiences as a graduate student and graduate assistant, she emphasized the value of having a master’s degree in student affairs and her experiences as a graduate assistant in an orientation program while pursuing that degree. She explained,

After discovering the program on the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) website, I applied to the program, was accepted, and then worked as a graduate assistant in orientation. Being able to apply what I was learning in my classes to my assistantship was priceless. It taught me how to apply theory to practice which I found very enjoyable and important (personal communication, November 13, 2007).

Erin believed it was important for her career to work and live in different parts of the country. She credited these experiences with developing in her the ability to adapt to a new campus environment. When asked to describe DU, she emphasized that the institution had a collaborative environment and that there was a shared vision among departments on campus. The common vision at DU was set by the school’s president who established a committee of faculty, staff, and students who insisted that a different
institutional value be focused on every year as part of a master plan. Community, diversity, and excellence were three values that have been emphasized at DU the past three years since the plan started. At the time of the fall visit, strengthening community alliances was the theme focused on at the university. Erin explained that students begin to learn about these values when they are in the application process and receive their first campus tour. She also noted that the president was supportive of the orientation program and often came to speak to the orientation leaders during the spring semester training sessions.

Consistently throughout the interview, Erin mentioned the training of orientation leaders. She considered the recruitment and training of the orientation leaders, along with overseeing orientation itself, as her two most important responsibilities. The recruitment of orientation leaders started during the fall semester, and the training occurred in a three-credit course taught by Erin in the spring.

While the training course consisted of several topics, its main emphasis was to focus on the importance of orientation, to understand the policies of and environment at DU, and to address what it means to be an orientation leader. Erin indicated that throughout the training, she intentionally incorporated student development theory and principles set forth by the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA). One of the theories she pointed to was Schlossberg’s (1989) marginality and mattering which supported a NODA principle of making all students feel welcome and important at new student orientation. By incorporating these theories and principles, Erin felt the training would make the orientation leaders more effective in their positions.
When asked to describe the qualities of an effective orientation director, Erin pointed to the importance of staying current in the field of orientation as well as becoming familiar with technology and its impact on students. She pointed to the social networking website Facebook and the potential dangers associated with the site. While she acknowledged that the website could be a positive social networking tool for students, she also noted that students could abuse the site by using it “too much” to meet people outside of their institution instead of interacting with their roommates and friends on campus. Erin also thought the site could be dangerous to vulnerable students forming relationships with “strangers.”

In order to stay current with orientation issues, she referred to her involvement as an active member in NODA. Attending regional and national conferences was helpful in giving her an opportunity to meet colleagues at other institutions facing the same challenges. One of the main challenges Erin faced at the time of the interviews was the transition of student leaders leaving and joining the program. After the initial recruitment of orientation leaders, some students who were selected left the program for various reasons. This situation forced Erin to recruit more orientation leaders in a short span of time before the spring semester training started. The director did not want to elaborate on why some students left the program.

Erin felt it important for orientation directors to be visionaries and “to see the bigger picture” when planning orientation programs and training orientation leaders. Part of this bigger picture was the importance of collaborating with different departments on campus in planning an effective program; she specifically mentioned residential life and academic advising. Most importantly, Erin felt her educational background and
involvement in NODA were essential to being an effective orientation director. Her master’s degree in student affairs prepared her to handle her job, including the training of orientation leaders. In addition to her job responsibilities, she pointed to her involvement with NODA as being influential to her overall career development as a practitioner. Based on her experiences with the association, she established relationships with other orientation professionals across the country that helped her grow from the time she first entered the field. She felt these experiences had helped her become a more effective orientation director, despite some of the transition issues with current orientation leaders.

In our second interview, Erin described physical artifacts, including the university’s physical setting and historic buildings, as being the most prominent and recognizable at DU. While she admitted that students may not be familiar with the university’s history, she noted that the university’s oldest building, Clock Hall, could be recognized from anywhere on campus, and from parts of the downtown area. Intertwined with the school’s history, Erin discussed the impact earthquakes had on shaping buildings at the school. “The history of earthquakes that have hit this campus is still something that lingers on people’s minds. Regardless if students were born yet, they are aware that this is something that could affect the campus and has done so in the past” (personal communication, November 14, 2007). While Clock Hall was recognizable across campus and known as the school’s oldest building, it was a newer building that Erin described as “more symbolic” of DU. The school’s newly constructed library, named after a famous human rights activist, had floors that were specifically open to the public, not just individuals affiliated with the university. The floors were dedicated with diverse themes.
to honor local cultures from the Asian, Latino, and African-American communities.

According to the orientation director,

This (the public floors) was the university’s way of furthering its presence in the local community. Since we are right downtown, and have such diversity among our student body, we also have this diversity in our city. The library is an opportunity to showcase our commitment to serving the public and that we truly value diversity (personal communication, November 14, 2007).

When asked to describe how and when students are first exposed to the meanings of these artifacts, she explained that this occurred during their first visit to campus at which time they receive a campus tour. She also noted, however, that depending on the tour guide, some artifacts might be discussed more than others. For example, although she indicated that physical artifacts were the most prominent at DU and would most likely be pointed out during the tour, she noted that a tour guide might tend to point out and focus more on behavioral artifacts like traditions since students may want to know how to get involved on campus. Erin added that the tour guide might emphasize artifacts that he/she is familiar with based on his/her own student experience.

Although artifacts are pointed out to some extent at new student orientation, she noted that it is mostly up to the orientation leaders to share their personal experiences with new students, and it is during these informal conversations that the meanings of artifacts start to be shared. Even if this happens informally, according to Erin, orientation leaders do have a role in the sharing process. The main point about the sharing of these experiences, however, was that it happens informally and optionally. Depending on the leader, he or she may choose to share certain personal experiences with the group that may include
references to the meanings of cultural artifacts. Although Erin noted that one of her main responsibilities was the training of orientation leaders, she did not think communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts was a purpose of the sessions. She admitted that this may happen to some extent, but it was not the goal of the trainings. Preparing students to be able to carry out their duties as orientation leaders was the main purpose of the training, according to Erin.

As for her own role in communicating the meanings of artifacts to students, Erin viewed this as a collaborative effort with other student affairs offices such as residential life and academic advising. She felt she did not have enough one on one contact with students at orientation to discuss these things, but that there were opportunities throughout the spring semester training of orientation leaders to do so. When asked whether she did this intentionally or unintentionally as part of the training, she thought it was mostly unintentional in that it was natural for artifacts and their meanings to be discussed through the course of training in which many orientation leaders discuss their experiences on campus. Erin did clarify that while she did not intentionally discuss the institution's history during training, she does intentionally talk to the students about the history of orientation and NODA and why this background was important to them as orientation leaders.

The researcher asked what messages cultural artifacts sent to first-year students. Erin responded by continuing to focus on the influence of physical artifacts in both a positive and negative context. She thought the newly constructed library sent a strong message to the local community and student population about what is valued at DU, noting, “I think some students may view it as just a fancy research facility, but I think most of them
understand what it symbolizes to our campus and city, that the school is committed to
diversity above all” (personal communication, November 14, 2007). As for cultural
artifacts that sent a negative message, Erin explained that the university had a major
parking problem that sent the wrong messages to commuter students. Despite having two
campus parking garages and parking for the public, she explained that students still had
difficulty finding parking on campus and in the downtown area. “I consider the lack of
parking to send a negative message to students because we have a large commuter base.
But if a student travels an hour to campus, and then can’t find a parking spot, what
message is this sending to the student?” (personal communication, November 14, 2007).
While the lack of parking was framed by Erin as a cultural artifact that sent a symbolic
message, it could have been considered a physical artifact because of the nature of the
issue in that it referenced the university’s location and physical setting. While Erin
considered the university’s location and physical setting to be influential cultural artifacts
at DU, these particular artifacts may present a negative aspect to the campus community
because of a lack of parking.

Spring Visit

Orientation Leader Focus Group Interview

In February 2008, the researcher conducted a focus group interview with orientation
leaders, lasting about 90 minutes, and observed a three-hour training session for
orientation leaders. During this visit, the researcher met informally with other
administrators at DU including the president, the vice president for student involvement,
and the director of academic advising, who were all special guests at the orientation
leader training observed by the researcher. Prior to the spring visit, the director had arranged for eight students to participate in the focus group interview. While these students initially indicated to the director that they would be interested in participating in the study, only three attended. The researcher attributed the lack of attendance to the transition of orientation leaders in the program. The three students, who participated, however, provided thorough responses to the interview questions. A male sophomore, a female junior, and a male senior, were the three student orientation leader participants. All of the orientation leaders described DU with great affinity, noting it was a place they described to family and friends as “diverse”, “great”, “home”, and “comfortable”. The male sophomore referred to the school’s “rich cultural history” that people were unaware of and noted that the campus was home to a couple of Olympic heroes who were DU alums.

When asked by the researcher about what was valued at the university, the students responded by talking about the university’s location and the job opportunities available in the region for DU graduates. The male senior added, “We believe that DU has the potential to be ranked among the top colleges in this nation and that if we work hard, the rewards will come in the end in the form of a great job” (personal communication, February 5, 2008). This comment shed light on the perspective of students who believed the school was headed toward becoming one of the best in the nation, not just the western region.

The researcher asked the students to reflect on their own orientation experiences and how they would describe these experiences; the students responded using words including “memorable”, “comforting”, “exciting”, and “friendship”. The female junior
orientation leader reflected on her experience transitioning from high school into a new environment and getting to spend the night away from home during their orientation; she remarked, "My orientation was a blast...it was so much fun. Getting to stay overnight in the residence halls with people I didn't even know was crazy, yet I loved every second of it. I was so excited and yet so comforted at the same time" (personal communication, February 5, 2008). The description of DU as a place that felt like home and had a comforting environment was a common response given by the orientation leaders.

After discussing what the students remembered about their own orientation experiences, they talked about why they decided to become orientation leaders. The students indicated that becoming an orientation leader had many rewards including an opportunity to give back to the school, an opportunity to join a group and feel part of something, an opportunity to bond with others, and an opportunity to be part of the school's history. The idea of having an opportunity to get involved with their institution seemed to be the driving force among the students to want to become orientation leaders. One student added, "This school has been home to many great people and I wanted to leave my mark, permanently or temporarily, by helping out new students" (personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Following these reflections, to help understand more about the roles of the student leaders, the researcher asked the students to describe the qualities of an effective orientation leader. Friendliness, enthusiasm, helping, honesty, listening, and orientation leadership ability were the main qualities the students discussed. They felt these qualities were important in helping new students feel comfortable in transitioning into a new environment. In the in-depth interviews with the orientation director at DU, these
qualities of effectiveness were not mentioned. One of the reasons for this may be because different qualities are required for orientation directors and student orientation leaders to be effective. At DU, however, because of the orientation leader transition issue and lack of interest among students to participate in the focus group, the researcher attributed these problems to a strained or nonexistent relationship between the students and orientation director.

When asked what the most prominent cultural artifacts were at DU, the students described physical artifacts such as the newly constructed library and statues of reverent individuals who were part of the school’s history. The male sophomore explained why these artifacts were significant at the university; “The statues of these individuals and the name of this library represents so much of who we are as an institution. We are part of this diverse city, right downtown, and the people are part of us even though they may not go to school here” (personal communication, February 5, 2008).

In addition to discussing physical artifacts and their connection to DU’s history, the students discussed athletics traditions and the famous alumni who were part of these sports teams. The male senior explained, “The traditions involving sports are important here. DU has a great tradition with sports. We actually have the top ranked judo team in the nation! People think of football and basketball as the big college sports and, although we have famous alums from those programs, that is not necessarily the case here” (personal communication, February 5, 2008). While famous alumni who were writers, actors, and musicians were mentioned, the students consistently talked about well-known athletes who excelled professionally. Despite the generation gap between the student leaders and former athletic stars, the students idolized these athletes as heroes because
they had attended DU and were famous. Considering that the football, basketball, and baseball teams were not nationally well known, the emphasis placed on the importance of the athletics traditions and the former star athletes by the orientation leaders was slightly surprising. Though the athletic teams, at one time, had a legacy in which great athletes turned professional and were successful, at some point, the torch was not passed to the next generation of athletes coming to DU. It was interesting that one of the students mentioned a top ranked judo team, one of the lesser-known athletic programs, and yet seemed genuinely excited about this team's success.

After discussing the prominent artifacts, the researcher asked the students to describe how they learned the meanings of these artifacts. The students pointed to extended campus tours at new student orientation and personal experiences at the university as the ways they learned the meanings of cultural artifacts at DU. All of the orientation leaders suggested that cultural artifacts were discussed at new student orientation, but mostly in informal conversations between orientation leaders and new students. One formal component of orientation was an extended campus tour that the students described as different from the general campus tour given by the admissions office. During the tour, orientation leaders had the opportunity to discuss physical artifacts, such as signature buildings and statues, in more detail.

The students admitted that they were not sure of the extent that artifacts' meanings were discussed at orientation, noting that the extent could vary depending on the orientation leader. A student orientation leader with rich experiences with cultural artifacts may be more likely to talk about these things with new students as opposed to a leader who is not familiar with the meanings of artifacts. The female junior noted, “I
think that people definitely talk about these things, it’s just tough to tell how much because orientation groups are so big here. It is tough to follow what the orientation leaders tell students in their individual groups. But I’m sure these things are talked about” (personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Continuing the discussion on cultural artifacts, the students indicated that they personally talked about artifacts and their meanings when leading orientation groups but with the exception of the campus tours, this mostly occurred through informal conversations. The male sophomore commented,

I know a bunch of things come up about the history and traditions here when I am working with students at orientation, but I think that talking about the meaning of these things sort of just happens…ya know? People just start connecting with one another and sometimes get to talk with the orientation leaders one on one at different points during the day (personal communication, February 5, 2008).

Instead of intentionally speaking with new students about the meanings of cultural artifacts during orientation sessions, the orientation leaders at DU felt that for the most part this process just happened. While the orientation leaders were able to identify prominent artifacts and even suggested where and when new students begin to learn about these things, they did not cite a formal process in which the meanings are communicated intentionally. This does not mean that the meanings of artifacts are not purposely communicated but, according to these three orientation leaders, informal conversations at new student orientation were the main way this happens.

The conversation in the focus group shifted to the messages cultural artifacts convey to new students. The orientation leaders felt that famous alums who once attended DU
and who were part of the school’s rich tradition were heroes who sent a positive message of inspiration to new students. The male sophomore commented, “When I found out that these individuals were students here at one time, I couldn’t believe it. I remember thinking that, wow, I go to school here and now it’s my turn to make a mark on this place” (personal communication, February 5, 2008). The orientation leaders also referred to the school’s location as a physical artifact that sent a positive message in that it was influential in attracting new students to the university. As for cultural artifacts that expressed a negative message, none of the orientation leaders indicated they could think of any. This does not mean there were no cultural artifacts at DU that sent negative messages to students, but these orientation leaders seemed more intent on focusing on the artifacts that expressed positive messages.

Observations of Orientation Leader Training

During the spring semester, orientation leaders attended a weekly three hour training session led by the orientation director. Upon successful completion of the course, students received three elective credits. The session observed by the researcher was well attended and featured several guest speakers including the university’s president, the vice president of student involvement, and the director of the advising and counseling center. Throughout the session, the researcher recorded field notes in a notebook to record observations that were later transcribed onto a laptop (see Appendix E).

After an introduction from the orientation director, the president spoke to students about the importance and significance of being a student at DU. He opened his remarks by asking the students to call him by his first name. Throughout his presentation, the president made references to cultural artifacts including the school’s physical setting and
used language in a symbolic context. The president went on to describe the need for DU students to feel “proud, embraced, warm, and hugged” and that orientation leaders played a big role in making this happen. After discussing the importance of the orientation leaders, he talked about DU’s location and its connection with the local community and how “great cities have great universities and that you should be proud to be a student here”. In his closing remarks, he discussed the notion that some people look down on DU because it is a commuter campus and not a residential one. He insisted that this mindset needed to stop because “we are a great institution that is very active and has students coming from many different places and walks of life and that is special.” Students applauded loudly as the president thanked the group and exited the room, while patting a student’s back on the way out.

After the president’s speech, Erin gave a presentation on the history of student orientation programs and NODA using PowerPoint slides. Throughout the presentation, she made references to the school’s history and architecture. She also included slides on relevant student development theories such as Schlossberg’s (1989) marginality and mattering. During the presentation, a couple of students appeared to be taking notes, but most of the students sat passively. The lecture was not interactive and the students appeared uninterested. One student did, however, ask Erin if she could email the slides to the group and she agreed. Overall, the presentation was highly informative, but it was undetermined whether the student leaders gained anything from it based on their behavior. Following the presentation, the students took a ten-minute break.

The remainder of the class consisted of group activities led by two orientation leaders. One of the activities made references to cultural artifacts at the university and it appeared
to be intentional. Two orientation leaders assigned their fellow orientation leaders into groups of six and unveiled a trivia game similar to “Jeopardy” with categories and dollar amounts posted on the chalkboard. The categories included DU people, places, and history. Students competed to answer questions that focused on famous alumni, buildings on campus, and historical facts about the university. While the groups were competing, there was constant laughter and jeering throughout the activity. The activity clearly inspired spirit and enthusiasm, as well as competition, between the student groups.

Following the trivia game, the director retook control of the class and congratulated everyone on doing a great job. She concluded the night with an announcement about an upcoming retreat for the orientation leaders. During the announcement, students packed up their belongings and exited the room quickly. A few students lingered and asked the director questions about the retreat. After a brief conversation, the students left and the director cleaned up the classroom alone.

Overall, the training session observed by the researcher included references to the meanings of cultural artifacts at DU. While the orientation director indicated this was not an intentional goal of the training, at this particular session, the president, orientation leaders, and the director herself made references to cultural artifacts such as the school’s physical setting, institutional history, heroes and heroines, and symbols.

Case 2: Scholarly University

The second institution visited was Scholarly University (SU), located in a metropolitan area in Northern California. The school enrolled approximately 35,000 students and offered both undergraduate and graduate degrees. The freshman class had
about 4,000 students and the Orientation Unit was responsible for providing first-year student activities and programming including new student orientation. According to the institution’s website, the university had a mix of traditional and nontraditional students. SU was founded in the mid 19th century and has been consistently ranked among the top public universities in the nation by the US News and World Report.

Documents from the SU orientation unit were collected and analyzed by the researcher (see Appendix F). Prior to visiting campus, an orientation guide distributed to new students and the orientation unit’s website was reviewed by the researcher. While the website contained mostly academic information, the orientation guide referenced several cultural artifacts at the university. Campus traditions, institutional history, school colors, mascots, architecture, language, and other artifacts were described in the handbook. The opening pages of the guide focused on these artifacts while the latter pages focused on academic services and resources available to new students. In the opening section of the guide, background was provided on the school’s history, campus traditions, landmark buildings, landscape, people, location, and student history. Throughout the guide, quotes about the university were featured from students, staff, faculty, and alumni: a former chancellor and president of the university noted that, “If you are bored with SU, you are bored with life.” The orientation guide also welcomed parents and family members of SU students and referred to them as part of the university’s family. The guide noted that orientation was not mandatory at SU, and the students who did attend were required to pay a fee. During the spring visit to SU, the researcher collected an orientation leader training syllabus in which there were two topics listed in future sessions related to
cultural artifacts. One of the sessions was about campus traditions and another session was on the institution’s history.

The orientation unit was administratively located in the division of student affairs and led by a full-time director. At the time of the visit, there were approximately 60 student orientation leaders in the program. According to the orientation unit’s website, the mission of the program was,

The SU Orientation team works year-round creating and implementing programs and publications to help welcome new undergraduates to SU and to ease their transition through their first few months. The program is focused on helping students select classes and receive academic advising, teaching students about services and co-curricular activities, taking students on campus tours, introducing students to new classmates, and conducting workshops on issues such as campus diversity and safety. Much of our success can be attributed to the group of continuing SU students who help run our programs and to the collaboration and support of campus academic and service units (Orientation unit website, n.d.).

Fall Visit

*Orientation Director Interviews*

In November 2007, the researcher met with Renee, the orientation director at SU. Two in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately an hour, were conducted over the course of two days in her office. The director was an alumnus with 25 years of professional experience working at the university in a number of positions, including the past 10 years as the school’s orientation director. She described her educational journey,
family influence, and work experience as the core components of her life and noted how all of the areas had “tied” together. The director indicated that she had a master’s degree in education, and although it was a non-student affairs program, she felt it was still valuable to working in the profession. Renee also discussed her involvement in NODA and how it influenced her career in a positive way by affording her the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions and share best practices.

Throughout the interview, Renee reflected on her own undergraduate experiences and changes she witnessed at the school as a professional. She discussed at length the issue of political activism at the school,

The political movements at SU have been either highly active or not very active. I would say that now most of these movements are protests instead of demonstrations like in the past. I don’t see that many students willing to make the sacrifice as they did a couple of decades ago even before me. I see students as having other interests these days (personal communication, November 16, 2007).

In addition to activism, she talked about how diversity was greatly valued at the institution despite some insensitivity that still exists. When asked how she learned about these values, Renee reflected on her family and childhood experiences and believed these things shaped her life and were also valued at the university. “By the time I got to college, I had such an appreciation for things that were important like compassion and service. I felt that I had my own set of core values and beliefs and that Scholarly seemed to fit all of these things for me” (personal communication, November 16, 2007).

Renee explained that students begin to learn about SU’s values when they are in the application process, attend information sessions, and participate in their first campus tour.
She also mentioned parents who attended SU as a likely source of exposing students to values of the university. When asked to describe her responsibilities as an orientation director, she discussed the supervision of professional staff, her involvement with committees on campus, and the coordination of orientation leader training; “The orientation leader training sessions are very important to the development of our students, including their orientation leadership abilities” (personal communication, November 16, 2007). She pointed to the role of her professional staff in helping her fulfill responsibilities as director. Renee also stressed the importance of collaborating with different departments on campus such as residential life and academic advising; “We rely on many different departments to provide students with detailed information. Our program cannot do it alone” (personal communication, November 16, 2007). Renee discussed the collaborative environment at orientation when discussing the extent values are discussed or communicated at orientation.

We have a powerful exercise at orientation called Stand Up in which we read a list of statements that students stand up if they can relate to them. Usually people look around first before standing up and eventually most of the lecture hall is standing. It is amazing. The students then are put in small group discussions to debrief the exercise (personal communication, November 16, 2007).

Through these exercises, Renee believed students start to learn more about the institution’s values.

Renee described the qualities of an effective orientation director by using words such as “patience”, “collaborative”, “energetic”, “enthusiasm”, “learning”, and “orientation leadership”. She explained that it was important for a director to know when to lead and
when to follow, a leadership style that was important to her interactions with student orientation leaders and professional staff members. According to Renee, there may be situations in which it was most appropriate for a staff member or student leader to take the lead and for her to follow. Depending on whether she is working with students or staff, she considered leadership to be an extremely important quality of effective orientation directors. She also explained that it was important for students to see her energy and enthusiasm when involved in an orientation leader training session.

During our second interview, Renee described verbal and behavioral artifacts, including language and symbols, as the most prominent artifacts at SU. “Language and school colors are very important here. You could be anywhere wearing a t-shirt with the SU logo and someone would shout at you “Go Cubs!” and you would instantly know what it meant” (personal communication, November 17, 2007). She also discussed the emphasis placed on the university’s athletic rival and the importance of not wearing the “wrong” school colors especially the week of a big game. Renee also talked about faculty members as heroes and heroines at the university who inspired students to do great things. She described faculty as the “backbone of the institution” who served as inspiring role models to students.

As for how and when students were first exposed to these artifacts, Renee pointed to legacy parents, the media, and campus tours. Similar to her response about when and how students first learned about the school’s values, she discussed the influence of parents who had attended SU and participation in campus tours. Because of the school’s reputation, she felt the university received more media attention than most other
institutions and, therefore, it was possible for students to be exposed to certain artifacts prior to visiting or attending SU.

According to Renee, cultural artifacts were discussed at orientation mostly through orientation leaders when working in small groups with new students and while giving campus tours. Although she was unsure of the extent that these discussions occurred, she believed that orientation leaders had conversations about the meanings of artifacts with students even if it happened informally. Renee also noted that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated directly and indirectly to orientation leaders during training sessions; she pointed to lectures and open-ended discussion as ways in which this happened. When asked about her own role in communicating the meaning of artifacts to students, she indicated that her alumni status was helpful in talking to students about these things. “I think students connect to my experience as an undergraduate here even though it was a long time ago. They like what I have to say about what SU means to me because I think they also feel strongly about the place” (personal communication, November 17, 2007).

Renee reflected on the messages cultural artifacts send to new students by discussing positive and negative aspects. As for a positive message, she again pointed to the influential faculty members at the university who inspire students to be successful. She described the faculty as “heroes” who created a sense of community and a welcoming environment for new students. “Some faculty members have developed such a reputation that students want to take their classes because of how well respected and passionate some of these professors are in their field. So in many ways, these individuals are influential to students and can serve as role models to them” (personal communication,
November 17, 2007). As for cultural artifacts that sent negative messages to students, Renee immediately described an example at the university involving insensitive language. She explained that there is a hub of Asian restaurants located close to campus that students referred to as the “Asian ghetto”. Even though students may not be intentionally trying to offend anyone using the language, the term expressed a negative message to students that was potentially harmful and non-inclusive.

Spring Visit

Orientation Leader Focus Group Interview

In February 2008, the researcher returned to SU to conduct a focus group interview with orientation leaders, lasting about 90 minutes, and an observation of a two-hour training session for orientation leaders. Throughout this visit, the researcher also met informally with orientation staff members at SU and took a tour of the campus.

Prior to the spring visit, the director had arranged for seven students to participate in the focus group interview. The student leaders included one female senior, one male senior, two female juniors, and three male sophomores. The interview began with the researcher asking the students to describe what they tell individuals, such as family and friends, about SU. Students used words including “historical”, “activism”, “committed”, “involved”, “spirited”, “and beautiful.” The male orientation leader reflected,

SU is a place where a student has access to an abundance of wonderful resources. One of my roommates is getting microfilm from across the world for a research project he is working on. I mean, how cool is that he has access to this material thousands of miles away on the other side of the globe? It proves that students with
conviction will find their way in life through this place. (personal communication, February 7, 2008).

As for what was valued at the university, students discussed topics including academics, opportunities for involvement, freedom to make choices, a sense of community, and activism. The female senior noted, “Individuals have a right to their own opinion and viewpoints here and they can thoughtfully express these without negative consequences” (personal communication, February 7, 2008).

The orientation leaders reflected on their own orientation experiences and described them by sharing their personal stories. A male sophomore described the experience as “interactive” and another male sophomore suggested that attending orientation eased his “social fears.” A female junior commented on her orientation experience; “First of all, it was raining. Second, my orientation leader gave the greatest tour ever. She told a lot of crazy stories about the campus, such as not stepping on certain things...some were true, some were not, but they stick with you” (personal communication, February 7, 2008).

After the discussion of their own orientation experiences, the students described why they became orientation leaders. They pointed to several reasons including the opportunity to give back to their school, an opportunity for a common bonding experience, an opportunity to share their student experience with someone else, and because of inspiration from their own orientation experiences. The female senior added, “I wanted to share my knowledge of the campus the way my orientation leader shared his with me. And, it was a great summer opportunity that included free food and free housing which is a big thing here” (personal communication, February 7, 2008). Although the
students acknowledged the benefits of being an orientation leader, they stressed that they would work for free because of their affinity for the university.

Following these reflections, the students described the qualities of effective orientation leaders. The students referred to a concept that was preached throughout orientation leader training known as HOSERS: Honesty, Objectivity, Sensitivity, Empathy, Referrals, and Support. The students suggested that this concept guided their work as orientation leaders and was useful in alleviating new students concerns about transitioning into a new environment. A male sophomore commented, “HOSERS helps us be more effective in everything we do, like in giving campus tours for example. We can effectively describe the campus while being objective and resourceful,” (personal communication, February 7, 2008). HOSERS was a symbol and form of lingo used by the orientation leaders to guide their work. As a verbal artifact, the orientation leaders used the word regularly throughout the interview and knew what every letter in the word stood for, as well as the symbolism expressed by the concept.

When asked to describe prominent artifacts at SU, the students discussed physical, behavioral, and verbal artifacts. Buildings, a famous gate, and campus grounds were a few of the physical artifacts discussed by the students. A male sophomore described the significance of a gate at an entryway to campus named after a notable alumnus; “Mitchell Gate is very prominent here...the colors and the structure of the gate are recognizable. It was built in the early times of SU and caused great controversy because of the artwork and signage attached to it. I’m not sure most students know that, but this is one of the stories that gets passed on” (personal communication, February 7, 2008). In this example, although the gate could be a physical artifact, the students described it as a key part of the
university's history and mentioned it was named after an influential alumnus; therefore, it was also an affective cultural artifact since it expressed meaning to members of the university community.

The students also gave examples of behavioral artifacts including campus traditions. Students running down 4.0 hill in the hopes of earning a 4.0 for the semester, seniors streaking through the library naked at midnight to leave their mark at SU, and students standing in a sacred hole on campus that protects their civil rights, were a few of the traditions the orientation leaders mentioned. Similar to the orientation director, the orientation leaders also discussed the use of language as a verbal artifact and referenced the same examples. Students talked about chants heard at football games and words shouted when one wears the school’s or rival’s colors. The phrase “Asian ghetto” was also mentioned, but not discussed as an artifact that sent a negative message to students. Instead of insensitivity, the orientation leaders thought the phrase simply referred to a meeting spot for students.

The orientation leaders referred to alumni who were pop culture icons as cultural artifacts that were perceived by students as heroes and heroines. Despite this perception, the orientation leaders were quick to mention that these icons, such as famous musicians and actors, were not necessarily deserving of heroic status. The orientation leaders explained that some famous individuals associated with SU received more attention and were better known than influential individuals who founded the school. For example, many of the streets surrounding the campus are named after influential alumni who have made generous donations and contributions to the school. One of the orientation leaders explained that most of the students at SU had no idea who the streets are named after or
what the contributions of these individuals were. In contrast, students were familiar with popular movies filmed at the campus, even if the movies were decades old. The point was that students were familiar with pop culture references regardless of how old or even it was before they were born, but they did not know much about their own institution’s history and contributors.

After discussing the prominent artifacts, the researcher asked the students to describe how they learned the meanings of these artifacts. The students responded that they learned the significance of these artifacts through informal conversations from faculty members, by attending sporting events, through extended campus tours at orientation, and because of personal experiences just being on the campus. A female junior commented, “I think you just pick up these things…I’m not sure how, but it seems like someone is there to tell you about these things…and then you just kind of learn about it. You wouldn’t know about these things, unless you are told by someone” (personal communication, February 7, 2008).

The orientation leaders suggested that the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated to some extent during new student orientation. Most of the participants thought this occurred mainly in informal conversations and through extended campus tours led by the orientation leaders. The tours were a formal opportunity for the orientation to leaders to communicate the meanings of key cultural artifacts at the university including myths and stories, historic buildings, and influential heroes and heroines. One student insisted that without the tours, the meanings of these artifacts would not be shared with new students. A male sophomore added that language was used
on the tours to point out certain neighborhoods that SU students live. One orientation leader noted,

Northside, Westside, Eastside...students at orientation have no idea what these words mean, until they start searching for an off-campus apartment in one of these neighborhoods. But once you are in that position, you remember that you learned about these neighborhoods on the tour (personal communication, February 7, 2008). Another student remarked that although cultural artifacts were discussed at orientation, it was not until students attended their first football game or wore the school's colors that they could truly understand the meanings of artifacts at SU.

As for the messages cultural artifacts sent to new students at SU, the orientation leaders focused on the "beautiful" buildings and campus grounds that served as inspiring to students. A male sophomore commented, "Sometimes I look around and I can't believe that I actually go to school here. When my friends come and visit, they have the same reaction. They get caught up in the beauty of it here" (personal communication, February 7, 2008). Other orientation leaders thought that the emphasis on pop culture and celebrities at the university was unhealthy considering a lack of attention was given to the influential figures in the institution's history. The male senior referred to an imprint of a famous musician's face on a bench near the campus quad and how students were familiar with this artifact,

While students recognize the imprint, they do not know the significance of the name behind Mitchell Gates and what it means to our school's history. I don't think they know the names behind many of the buildings and street signs here. Well, I didn't
know at first either but I wanted to learn because I care about this place (personal communication, February 7, 2008).

Observations of Orientation Leader Training

During the spring, orientation leaders attended a weekly semester-long, three-hour training session led by the orientation director, professional staff members, and returning orientation leaders. Students received three credits for successfully completing the training course. At the session observed by the researcher (see Appendix E), prior to the start of class, some of the students met the staff members at the orientation office and walked to the classroom building together. This appeared to be a simple act, but it demonstrated a connection between the staff and the orientation leaders. At the beginning of class, a returning leader introduced an icebreaker activity in which two students shared their personal biographies with the group. Although this appeared to be a personal exercise, the orientation director noted that two students volunteer every week to share this information. After the students shared their stories, the individuals in the room applauded excitedly.

The next exercise was a role play in which two orientation leaders acted out a scenario about looking for an off-campus apartment. One student was familiar with the neighborhoods and already had an apartment, while the other student was asking for help trying to find an apartment in a safe neighborhood. Kevin, a professional staff member, then debriefed the exercise with the class. The main point of the exercise was to show the orientation leaders how to make people feel welcome at SU by using inclusive language, a verbal artifact, when discussing off-campus neighborhoods.
Following this exercise, another activity was introduced by a student leader who facilitated a discussion about the orientation concept, HOSERS: Honesty, Objectivity, Sensitivity, Empathy, Referrals, and Support, that was discussed by the orientation leaders in the focus group interview. This word was used as a verbal and affective artifact that expressed meaning to the orientation leaders about what it meant to be a student at SU and part of the orientation program. In this exercise, the student leader discussed how this concept guided the work of all orientation leaders. While speaking in front of the group, a sign with the word HOSERS was displayed on the chalkboard behind the leader. The researcher also observed another sign in the room with the question, "What's important about this topic as it relates to: fall-admit freshman, parents, guests, family members, spring-admit freshman, spring-admit and fall-admit transfers?" This appeared to be another guiding concept in that anything discussed in the training, including HOSER, must be framed by these questions. This sign supported the orientation director's view that parents and family members are part of the SU family and community.

The training session observed by the researcher included several references to the meanings of cultural artifacts at SU. The orientation director had indicated this occurred both directly and indirectly in orientation leader training. Some of the activities led by the professional staff members and orientation leaders appeared to discuss symbols and language intentionally. During these activities, open-ended discussions would occur in which students tended to talk more about these artifacts and even share relevant personal experiences. For example, the role play exercise used to educate the orientation leaders about how to make new students feel welcomed when discussing off-campus
neighborhoods, prompted several students to raise their hands and provide feedback on the exercise and their own living experiences. At this particular training session, cultural artifacts were addressed. The orientation director's view that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated directly and indirectly in orientation leader training was supported.

Case 3: Tech University

Tech University (TU), located in coastal central California, was the third institution visited in this study. The school enrolled approximately 20,000 students and had a freshman class of about 4,000 students. The orientation unit was responsible for providing first-year student activities and programming including new student orientation. TU had one of the largest amounts of land for public universities in the state and its student body consisted mainly of in-state students.

TU was founded in the early 20th century as a vocational high school. An admissions brochure reported that the school's emphasis was to offer a comprehensive undergraduate education combining technical and professional curricula with the arts and humanities. The university website indicated that the guiding philosophy at TU was "learning by doing."

The orientation unit was administratively located in the division of student affairs and was led by a full-time director. The program had one of the largest groups of orientation leaders in the nation with approximately 600 volunteers. According to the unit's website, the program was described as:
The orientation unit at TU is coordinated by staff and operated by students for students, with a peer-helping method that creates a combination of excitement, learning, and new experiences for new students and their families in a fun, comfortable atmosphere. New first-year students are placed in small groups that participate in activities introducing them to the campus and community for the week prior to fall classes. The TU orientation experience is designed to assist new students with successful academic, social, and emotional transition to university life (Orientation unit website, n.d.).

To accomplish these goals, first-year students attended a weeklong orientation program.

Documents from the TU orientation unit were collected and analyzed by the researcher (see Appendix F). Prior to visiting campus, the researcher reviewed the orientation program's website and collected an orientation program handbook distributed to new students and parents. The website contained mostly academic information and student deadlines. There were references however to the orientation program's activities, which the participants considered to be program traditions. In the student and parent handbook, it was noted that the orientation program was nationally recognized for its practices working with new students. Besides a picture of the physical setting of the campus, there were no clear references to cultural artifacts. The handbook noted that orientation was not mandatory at TU, and students who attend were required to pay a fee. During the spring visit, the researcher collected an orientation leader training syllabus. There were no topics in the syllabus that referenced cultural artifacts.
Fall Visit

Orientation Director Interviews

In November 2007, the researcher met with Andrea, the orientation director at TU. Two in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately an hour, were conducted over the course of two days in her office. The director was an alumnus of TU and had 13 years of professional experience working at the institution in different positions including eight years as the orientation director. Prior to TU, she worked for four years at a community college in the region. She described herself as a student affairs practitioner who also earned a master’s degree in the discipline. Although she emphasized the importance of student development, she believed more in “learning by doing”, a TU motto, than student development theory. Andrea noted her involvement in NODA, indicating that at one time she was the president of the association.

The director thought it was important for outsiders to know that the campus was traditional in that the majority of students lived in a residence hall or in the college town. She noted that the institution had high academic standards and with a growing applicant pool, it was becoming increasingly more difficult for students to gain admission. The core academic disciplines included agriculture, engineering, business, architecture, liberal arts, and mathematics. The majority of students are Caucasian to which Andrea noted, “Hopefully with my work here in orientation and with the help of the multicultural center, we can effectively meet the needs of students of color considering they make up a small number of students here” (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

Andrea discussed the values at TU by pointing to the school’s philosophy and motto of “learn by doing.” The language is found throughout university publications and is used
in conversations by members of the campus community. Andrea noted that this philosophy encourages the value of practical experience and that, although academics are important, students need to gain hands on experience regardless of their disciplines. Andrea added that the university does value diversity and is making a push to increase its enrollment among minority populations. When asked to describe how she learned the meaning of these values, the orientation director pointed to her own experiences as a student and professional at the university. "I live the values of our university every day. I really am a product of this university and its values since I am a big believer in practical hands-on experience instead of theory" (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

As for how and when students are exposed to values at TU, she thought there were several possible ways including the application process, legacy parents, attending the university's open house, and attending orientation. She also commented on the university's role in working with students using technology,

The university does a really good job staying in communication with potential students. Both during and after the application process, the university keeps students informed of important announcements through the use of technology such as student websites and email (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

Since the school specialized in technical fields, she felt it was important that the university used technology as a tool in communicating academic information to students. She did not indicate however that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated through technology.

Andrea noted that the philosophy of the institution and the orientation program is to welcome parents as part of the university family. "We know that family members are
truly there to support the student and we truly believe that parents can be partners instead of problems. This is why we have taken the initiative in our program to really orient the parents so that they can help our students and not hinder them” (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

While she was unsure to what extent the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to new students at orientation and through the orientation leader training, Andrea described a gigantic rally with one of the athletics teams as an event in which this happens. She noted,

One year we focused on our football team and another year we had soccer, we tend to rotate. The coaches and players from the teams are out there and then the cheerleaders come out to join them. It is a symbolic bridge between academics and athletics because most of our students come in knowing the academic expectations here, but at orientation, we show them that we value athletic traditions here too like some of the schools with bigger programs (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

As for the orientation leader training sessions, once again, Andrea pointed to the orientation leaders as having more of a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, if this occurred at all.

When asked to describe the qualities of an effective orientation director, she pointed to one who is “responsible”, “collaborative”, “practical”, “approachable”, and a “role model”. She also noted that it is important for a director to know when to be a leader and when to be a manager adding,

For me, I truly see these duties as going hand in hand because there are some administrative tasks that just have to get done or else a project will not be successful.
But I try to be a leader more than a manager because I want others in the office to see this so they can serve as role models and orientation leaders to students (personal communication, November 19, 2007).

The director described her responsibilities as an orientation director by discussing issues including staff leadership, overseeing the training of orientation leaders, and the coordination of all orientation activities. Most importantly, she pointed to the value of orientation leaders who volunteer their time and talents to be part of the program. Since the unit only had two full-time staff including the director, the services of orientation leaders were heavily relied upon. Because of this reliance, Andrea felt it was her role to train them how to be effective orientation leaders especially with the large groups of students they were responsible for at orientation. While she noted that these students have a responsibility to the students and university, she felt her commitment to the university had to be even greater because ultimately it was her duty to make sure the orientation leaders are doing their jobs effectively.

Throughout the interview Andrea also reflected on her involvement with NODA. As a past president of the association, she realized how influential the association was to its members and the orientation field. While she was president, she was able to establish “lifelong” relationships with board members who also worked in orientation programs across the country. To this day, she still takes great pride in being referred to as a past president of the association and has collaborative relationships with many of the individuals she served with during her tenure.

In our second interview, Andrea described the university’s physical setting as the most prominent and recognizable artifact at TU. The director noted, “We are situated ten
miles off the Pacific coast. We are surrounded by green rolling hills and beautiful scenery. I believe that our location is a huge draw for students here” (personal communication, November 20, 2007). She also discussed that there were traditions that were specific to the orientation program and not the entire university; “I consider our shared reading program a huge new tradition for us. We are only in our fifth year doing it but I consider it a tradition in many ways. Our orientation leaders enjoy giving feedback to one another and having discussions with new students about the common books they have read” (personal communication, November 20, 2007). While the reading program was not mandatory, with an entering class of close to 4,000 students, the tradition had caught on enough that it had a solid foundation.

As for how and when students are first exposed to artifacts at TU, Andrea again pointed to family members who have attended the university. “I think many students select TU because they have had a family member attend. And I think these family members are the first individuals who expose students to cultural artifacts” (personal communication, November 20, 2007) Although she noted that students may visit the campus during the application process, they are more likely to be exposed to these things in more detail at the university’s open house, which students attend once they are accepted, or when they attend orientation.

According to Andrea, about 80% of the incoming freshmen class attends new student orientation. Students who attend receive a detailed campus tour that highlights the physical setting of the campus. In addition to the tour, presentations and workshops were led by the staff and orientation leaders who discussed some of the artifacts at the institution including the school’s physical setting, language, and campus traditions. When
asked how students learned the meanings of artifacts at TU, she responded, “I don’t feel we intentionally teach them the meanings of these things, but instead, we give them a preview of these artifacts that they will get the chance to experience themselves” (personal communication, November 20, 2007). An example of this would be at orientation when students are exposed to the school’s athletics traditions, but they may not truly understand or know the meaning of these traditions until they attend a sporting event on campus.

Andrea commented that in her position as an orientation director, she did not communicate the meanings of artifacts, but that it was the orientation leaders who introduced students to these things; “I think unintentionally in conversations with students we discuss these things, but I don’t really have a system or habit of communicating the meanings of artifacts... maybe I should!” (personal communication, November 20, 2007). Perhaps the director did not think she had a role in this process because of the university’s emphasis on “learning by doing”, meaning, the orientation leaders had to have their own experiences with cultural artifacts in order to learn their meanings.

Although she did not personally think she communicated the meanings of artifacts, she did acknowledge that other offices and individuals on campus had a role in the process. Residence life, academic advising, and faculty were three groups that Andrea thought were influential in communicating the meanings of campus traditions with new students.

As for the messages cultural artifacts communicate to new students at TU, the director pointed to the inspiration provided by the school’s physical setting; “We are so
close to the ocean and I just think that conveys a really good sense of place to students. The ocean is so calm and peaceful that I think this may help students cope when they get stressed out during the semester" (personal communication, November 20, 2007). Andrea indicated that she could not think of any cultural artifacts that sent negative messages except to note that, “We may have a lack of cultural artifacts and I’m not sure what this means” (personal communication, November 20, 2007).

Spring Visit

Orientation Leader Focus Group Interview

In February 2008, the researcher returned to campus to conduct an approximately 90 minute long focus group interview with orientation leaders and to observe a training session for orientation leaders. Throughout this visit, the researcher met informally with the other orientation staff member and graduate assistants along with taking a campus tour.

Prior to the spring visit, the director had arranged for ten students, three female sophomores, two male sophomores, two male juniors, and three female seniors to participate in the focus group interview. The interview began with the researcher asking the students to describe what they tell individuals, such as family and friends, about TU. As a reference point, the students were asked to think about words they use when describing the university to other individuals such as family and friends. “Home”, “friendly”, “community”, “beautiful”, and “practical” were the main words students used in their responses. One student described TU as a little big school with a small town feel. Another student remarked about the beauty of the campus and its proximity to the ocean.
When asked to discuss what was valued at the university, students responded by talking about friendship, trusting peers, a sense of community between the university and town, people are approachable, and academic quality.

The orientation leaders reflected on their own orientation experiences and described them by using words including “friendship”, “memories”, “fun”, “pride”, and “bonding”. A female sophomore remarked, “I had one of the greatest experiences in my life at orientation. We had a small group that bonded from the first day. I thought it would take me a long time to find a group that I could feel like I could belong to, but I felt like I had found a niche from that first week” (personal communication, February 10, 2008).

After reflecting on their own orientation experiences, the researcher asked the students to explain why they decided to become orientation leaders. Many of the students indicated that becoming an orientation leader gave them opportunities to give back to the school; to make strong friendships; to join a group and feel part of something; to help others; and to be part of an amazing experience. A male junior explained, “Being a leader in this program is so much more than just working at orientation for a week, it is a feeling. I wanted to be part of something that I knew would make an impact on someone that would last forever” (personal communication, February 10, 2008).

Following these reflections, the researcher asked the students to describe the qualities of an effective orientation leader; “enthusiasm”, “honesty”, “patience”, “flexibility”, “communication”, and “orientation leadership ability” were the qualities cited by the students. The leaders felt that honesty was particularly important in helping students transition into a new environment. One of the orientation leaders noted that it was possible to run into students from a group well after orientation and that they would still
remember you and the information you provided them; therefore, it was important to provide accurate and honest information. Another male junior discussed the importance of effective communication and leadership skills and remarked, "I believe a leader has to be able to convey information, and receive it from those around him. The communication here is a two-way street. You have to be able to lead and follow" (personal communication, February 10, 2008). This comment was similar to the director's comment about managing and leading and knowing how and when to do both.

In discussing the prominent cultural artifacts at TU, the students mainly focused on behavioral and verbal artifacts. The behavioral artifacts included campus traditions, off-campus traditions, and program traditions. Students described attending sporting events on campus, going to a farmer's market in town, and the summer reading program for new students. Students talked about the power of language at the campus including the school's motto, "learn by doing". Students also mentioned the fight songs that are chanted at football games. Another student discussed famous alumni, such as athletes and musicians, referring to these individuals as heroes. Two students described a statue of the school's mascot on campus as a physical artifact that was known as a popular meeting place for students.

After discussing the prominent artifacts, the researcher asked the students to describe how they learned the meanings of these artifacts. The students responded that they learned the significance of these artifacts through orientation leader training, friends, participating in school activities such as sporting events, and personal experiences of just being on the campus. The researcher followed up this question by asking to what extent artifacts and their meanings were discussed at orientation sessions. All of the students
suggested that artifacts were discussed at orientation throughout all of the week’s activities. A female senior remarked, “We conduct campus tours with our groups during the week and point out many of these artifacts we have discussed today. This may seem informal, but I think it is a conscious effort for orientation leaders to introduce these things” (personal communication, February 10, 2008).

The orientation leaders indicated that they personally share the meanings of cultural artifacts with new students during orientation sessions, but mostly through informal conversations. A female senior remarked, “The focus at our orientation is more on learning where things are than what the significance is of these things like artifacts. I think it is up to the orientation leaders to put personal effort in to share the meanings of these things based on their own experiences here at TU” (personal communication, February 10, 2008).

As for the messages cultural artifacts sent to new students at TU, the orientation leaders focused on language and traditions as making students feel welcome and part of the university. They pointed to the term “Techies” as inclusive to individuals who were part of the orientation program. In addition to on-campus and program traditions, the orientation leaders felt that off-campus traditions strengthened their connection with the local town. When asked to describe artifacts that sent negative messages to students at TU, the orientation leaders could not think of a specific one, but instead discussed having a lack of a signature building on campus. A female sophomore commented, “Don’t get me wrong, this campus is absolutely beautiful. But I think of some schools that have magnificent architecture with all of the buildings looking the same in a neat way. Here, we have a couple of buildings that are cool looking but they are lacking in character,”
(personal communication, February 10, 2008). The orientation leaders thought that having a signature physical artifact would make a lasting impression on students when visiting and touring the campus.

Observations of Orientation Leader Training

During the spring semester, orientation leaders attended a bi-weekly, two-hour training session led by the returning orientation leaders, professional staff, and the orientation director. Students did not receive credit for attending these sessions and participation was strictly on a voluntary basis. The session observed by the researcher (see Appendix E) focused on conscious decision making for college students. Approximately 50 students attended the session. While students were arriving, one of the orientation leaders passed around a scavenger hunt sign up sheet. In the meanwhile, students were eating pizza from a parlor located inside the union.

A returning leader started the session with an activity which required students to listen to statements, and then line up at four signs with the words “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. Examples of the statements included, “I return money when given too much change; I never use profanity; I stop those from talking about others behind their back; I correct those who make racial slurs; I stop those who engage in sexual harassment; I would cheat on a test; I would steal supplies from my employer.” After each statement, students were given an opportunity to explain their choices. Students would sometimes applaud, snap their fingers, or laugh to show support for their fellow orientation leaders. After the last statement, students were then placed into six groups to discuss the exercise and share their experience.
Following the group conversations, the director and the leader of the activity debriefed the exercise with the class. Andrea clearly connected well with the students as she admitted that there were some statements that even she would have had trouble figuring out where to line up in the room. One student added, “I wanted to say that I strongly agreed that I would never steal from my employer. But then I realized I had a stapler from the office in my backpack.” The entire room erupted into laughter.

Immediately following the activity, the orientation leaders broke into two large groups to discuss programmatic and planning issues. Returning orientation leaders were placed in each group to oversee the discussions between the orientation leaders and assist with any questions.

The groups reconvened for program announcements about any upcoming events or activities of interest for the orientation leaders. A staff member talked about Same Gender Handholding Day, which was an upcoming event at the campus. The director mentioned a NODA regional conference for orientation leaders who may be interested in attending. In the last activity of the night, the director announced that there was a special surprise before everyone left. The male students proceeded to line up on one side of the room and began to sing a pop love song to the female students. The love song was in honor of Valentine’s Day, which was coming up later in the week. The director shared with me afterwards that this is an annual tradition put on by the male orientation leaders. Throughout the performance, the female students laughed and clapped. At the conclusion of the performance, the orientation leaders hugged one another and appeared to be energized. This was yet another collaborative activity that supported one of the orientation leaders’ perspectives that they joined the program to be part of a group.
The training session observed featured some references to the meanings of cultural artifacts at TU. Particularly, the program traditions and language identified by the orientation leaders and orientation director in the interviews were part of the training session. While cultural artifacts were referenced, the orientation director and orientation leaders appeared to be more concentrated on the decision-making activities and general planning issues. The observations of this session supported the orientation director's view that there were a lack of cultural artifacts at the school. At the same time however, the emphases on program traditions and lingo confirmed the director and orientation leaders' perspectives that these things were prominent cultural artifacts.

Case 4: Pride University

Pride University (PU), located in Southern California, was the fourth institution visited in this study. The school enrolled approximately 40,000 students and is located in a major metropolitan area. The freshman class had about 4,000 students and the orientation unit was responsible for providing first-year student activities and programming, including new student orientation. According to the university's website, PU had the largest number of freshman applications for a public university in the nation.

PU was founded in the early 20th century and prided itself as a national and global leader in research. The university website also reported the school was a leader in patient care, medical research, and community service. The website also reported PU was a leading arts and cultural center in the West, hosting more than 200 visual and performing arts events each year. In addition to emphasizing research and arts, the school prided itself on approximately 400,000 thousand alumni including some prominent individuals.
The orientation unit was located administratively in the division of academic affairs and led by a full-time director. At the time of this visit, there were approximately 70 orientation leaders in the program. The program's website was reviewed by the researcher prior to visiting the campus. According to the orientation unit's website,

The PU orientation program is designed each year to accomplish the following goals:

- Introduce the undergraduate community to new students from both an academic and personal perspective;
- Provide information and assistance to new students so that they may succeed academically and develop personally;
- Insure that students feel adequately prepared to face the challenges of their first year at PU;
- Allow students to meet each other and develop new relationships;
- Provide peer counselors who can share their own experiences as a source of support and information;
- Expose students to the wide range of issues facing them as PU students, including factors affecting their personal safety;
- Introduce the variety of students services that are available on campus, so that students feel able to navigate the university on their own (Orientation unit website, n.d.).

Documents from the PU orientation unit were collected and analyzed by the researcher (see Appendix F). Prior to visiting the campus, the researcher collected an orientation program handbook distributed to new students and a pamphlet describing the student honor code at PU. The handbook referenced some of the physical artifacts at the school.
including statues and buildings while the honor code served as an affective and verbal artifact to the participants. During the spring visit to campus, the researcher collected an orientation leader training syllabus that featured one session devoted to discussing the institution’s history.

Fall Visit

Orientation Director Interviews

In December 2007, the researcher met with Nicole, the orientation director at PU. Two in-depth interviews, each lasting about 60 minutes, were conducted in her office over the course of two days. The director was an alumnus of PU and had 25 years of higher education work experience. She was currently entering her 20\textsuperscript{th} year working in the orientation program and referred to herself as an “old school professional”. Prior to working in orientation, she worked in the admissions office at PU. She described herself as a student affairs professional who always enjoyed working with students. Nicole added, “I was always very active on campus as a student and this career was a very natural progression for me” (personal communication, December 18, 2007). When discussing her professional background, Nicole also noted her involvement in NODA.

Nicole described PU as a research intensive institution that was committed to getting undergraduates involved in research early on in their student careers. She added that the biggest issues facing students involved technology and responsibility. According to her, “Facebook and online communities are really popular with students these days. Another issue is helping students move from a sense of entitlement to a sense of responsibility and ownership for their actions” (personal communication, December 18, 2007). She
explained that students seemed more mature in previous decades and were better equipped to handle potentially harmful situations, but she also noted that this was just her perspective.

As for the values of PU, Nicole pointed to research, academics, and faculty. She noted that although the school was student centered, the guiding philosophy was on academics and undergraduate research. When asked how she learned about these values, Nicole referred to her own experiences as a student and staff member at PU. She described a recent experience in which she was involved in an honor code campaign known as the “Genuine Ram”. Throughout the interview, she kept coming back to the importance of this campaign and the symbols it created. The Ram is the school’s mascot and was well known among the student body. With the help of the Dean’s office, Nicole drafted a statement that described the core ethical values at PU and what it means to be a “Genuine Ram”.

In discussing how and when students are exposed to these values, she pointed to activities that occurred at orientation. All new students were given a “Genuine Ram” pin at orientation, as well as a handbook that detailed the honor code. In addition to the handbook, the Dean of Students’ presentation at orientation addressed the “Genuine Ram” statement and discussed what it meant to be a PU student. Nicole added, “This presentation really covers what is valued here and they are hearing about these things early in their student careers. I think it is influential that they hear about these things, not from me, but the dean of students” (personal communication, December 18, 2007).

Nicole described her responsibilities at the university by talking about overseeing orientation related activities. At the time of this visit, she supervised 75 paid orientation

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leaders and three professional staff members. She also indicated the office was responsible for serving thousands of students and hundreds of parents. The program assisted with academic advising for students taking first quarter classes. In addition to these duties, Nicole discussed her responsibility for the training of orientation leaders; “We begin hiring orientation leaders in the winter quarter and then I do the training in the spring quarter. Students attend a weekly class and receive academic credit. Several topics are addressed including orientation leadership skills, academic advising, and diversity” (personal communication, December 18, 2007).

When asked the extent PU’s values were discussed with new students at orientation, Nicole immediately replied that the values were integrated into several themes throughout the sessions; “The dean discusses what it means to be a “Genuine Ram” in his presentation. Our orientation leaders also conduct three hour campus tours with the students and talk about these things. The dean and orientation leaders may place more emphasis on different values, but there is definitely some overlap there” (personal communication, December 18, 2007).

Nicole described the qualities of an effective orientation director as one who is collaborative, patient, organized, caring, current, and involved with the university and NODA. Nicole added, “I am most influenced by the ideas that I can share and discuss with my colleagues both here at PU and at other universities across the nation. This helps with addressing issues facing our campus and how we can better plan our program to address these things” (personal communication, December 18, 2007). One of the main issues facing students at her campus was technology used as a social tool. She specifically referenced websites such as Myspace and Facebook in which students
created online profiles and posted pictures of themselves and friends that were sometimes inappropriate. As an orientation director, she felt it was her responsibility to be familiar with these technological tools and to try to educate first-year students about the potential dangers of such sites. Nicole indicated that at orientation she spoke to students about these websites during one of the sessions on ethical decision making.

In the second interview, Nicole described symbols, language, and architecture as the most prominent artifacts at PU. She continued to emphasize the words “Genuine Ram” and described the symbolism of this concept to students;

Once we came up with the name for this statement, we tried to figure out how to market it to students. Since our school colors are well liked, we decided to put the words on backpacks that students received at orientation. We thought this would be cool and, fortunately, it got the students approval (personal communication, December 19, 2007).

In addition to the symbolism of “Genuine Ram”, Nicole discussed the significance of campus architecture at PU noting, “The buildings are part of an oral tradition at this campus. They communicate a sense of pride and tradition to students. We have landmarks on our campus that are part of our history” (personal communication, December 19, 2007). Joyce Hall, one of the school’s oldest buildings, has become the signature image of the campus. According to Nicole, over 70 million dollars was spent on extensive renovations to the building after an earthquake in the mid 1990’s. She noted that while it may have been more economical to construct a new building, Joyce Hall symbolized “too much importance” to the university community.
As for how and when students were first exposed to these artifacts, she pointed to students attending orientation and learning about what it means to be a Genuine Ram in the dean of students presentation. In addition to this presentation, she believed cultural artifacts were discussed with students in groups with their orientation leaders. Although she was not sure of the extent the artifacts were discussed in the individual groups, she was confident that students got a sense of these things when participating in the three hour campus tours with their orientation leaders.

Nicole thought that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to a high extent at both new student orientation and in orientation leader training. As for new student orientation, she pointed to the significance of extended campus tours;

I think the tours can be very influential. As a prospective student, tours are coordinated by a separate office. But at orientation, our orientation leaders give an extended tour that is very detailed. On this tour, many things are communicated to students including the meanings of artifacts. I know many stories about the campus are shared during these tours (personal communication, December 19, 2007).

In orientation leader training, Nicole took it upon herself to make sure cultural artifacts were part of the sessions. She intentionally devoted sessions to discussing the school’s history, stories, myths, architecture, and campus traditions. Part of her emphasis on cultural artifacts may have been due to her own experiences as an undergraduate at the school. Nicole explained,

I loved my time here as a student so much. Like I said, it is definitely one of the reasons I went in to this field. And it is probably one of the reasons why I enjoy talking about these things (cultural artifacts) so much and make it a point to focus on
them at orientation and in the leader training (personal communication, December 19, 2007).

The director further described her role in communicating the meanings of artifacts by reflecting on the first day of orientation in which she gets the opportunity to speak to students; “I do it very purposely in regards to addressing the language and phonetics here…specifically repeating the phrase “Genuine Ram”. I talk about the campus community at PU and how they get to be part of the great traditions here” (personal communication, December 19, 2007). Although she did not discuss other specific offices as having a role in communicating the meanings of artifacts, she mentioned parents who were alums of PU as individuals that introduced and shared these meanings with their sons and daughters.

In discussing the messages cultural artifact artifacts sent to new students at PU, Nicole again pointed to the symbol and language of “Genuine Ram”. She noted that even after students graduate, they will forever be linked to being a Ram and will remain proud of their institution. She added, “We are part of a world community at PU. You are here to do great things while you are here, not just for yourself but also for the community. Being part of this world community makes you part of a proud family. You really start to believe this message after awhile” (personal communication, December 19, 2007). The director could not think of any cultural artifacts that sent negative messages to new students; she believed that the artifacts she discussed throughout the interview sent only positive messages.
Spring Visit

Orientation Leader Focus Group Interview

In February 2008, the researcher returned to campus to conduct an approximately 90 minute long focus group interview with orientation leaders and an observation of a training session for orientation leaders. Throughout this visit, the researcher also met informally with the orientation director.

Prior to the spring visit, the director had arranged for five students, two female seniors, two male seniors, and one female junior to participate in the focus group interview. The students were asked to describe what they tell individuals, such as family and friends, about PU. As a reference point, the researcher instructed them to think about words they used when describing the university. "Diverse", "academic", "amazing", "proud", "involved", and "home" were the main words students used in their responses. One student described PU as a lot bigger than she expected, but it provided so many opportunities to get involved. When asked to discuss what was valued at the university, students responded that "academics", "honesty", "integrity", "involvement", and "pride" were extremely important at the university. In the in-depth interview, the orientation director referred to many of the same values the orientation leaders described. This may have been because the director, being an alumnus of the institution, had a strong familiarity with the university's values.

When asked to reflect on their own orientation experience and the words they would use to describe it, students responded by discussing "diversity", "family", "friendships", and "fun memories". A male senior remarked, "My parents were alums here and when I told them I was planning to go to school here, they thought I was settling. But once I
attended orientation, everything changed…it was so much fun. My parents picked me up and could tell how ecstatic I was about coming here and knew that I had made the right choice” (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

Building on this question, the researcher asked the students to describe why they became orientation leaders. The students pointed to several reasons including helping others, sharing knowledge with others, giving back to the institution, and because of the influence of friends who encouraged them to join the program. A female senior explained, “Being able to help students and knowing that I had a chance to make a change in their student experience was really important to me. I really wanted to have that feeling” (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

Following these reflections, the students described the qualities of an effective orientation leader. “Patience”, “flexibility”, “organization”, “honesty”, “welcoming”, and “communication skills” were the main qualities the students cited in response to the question. The orientation leaders felt honesty was particularly important in helping students feel welcome at the university especially because of its size. A female junior added,

Coming from high school, you have so many worries about entering a new environment. Then when you add the fact that this school has over 40,000 students, new students may get even more concerned. But by being honest with them and sharing your own personal experiences, this can help put some of their fears at ease because they will see someone who also may have felt that way at one time (personal communication, February 19, 2008).
As for prominent cultural artifacts at PU, the students focused mainly on behavioral and verbal artifacts that were attached to symbols at the institution. Behavioral artifacts included traditions involving the school's rival and attending sporting events on campus. During the week preceding the Homecoming football game, each day would feature a different activity geared at mocking the school's rival. One of the activities included traveling to the rival's campus and attempting to decorate a statue of the school's mascot in PU colors. The orientation leaders noted that students at the rival school would perform a similar prank to one of the prominent statues at PU. A female senior remarked, "If you go to school here, you definitely cannot like our rival and must root against them at all times. We talk to students about this rivalry at orientation. You really get sucked into the rivalry stuff here" (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

Some of the verbal artifacts orientation leaders discussed included the myths that are shared with students particularly on campus tours. One of the myths told by the leaders was that if students stepped on a particular step of a campus stairwell, they would never graduate from the school. While the origins of the myth were unknown, the orientation leaders noted that it is common to see students avoid that step. Regardless of whether students believe in the myths, it is tradition for orientation leaders to pass these legendary tales on to new students and put their own twist on them while giving the tours. In addition to discussing multiple artifacts, the students talked about what being a "Genuine Ram" meant to them. A male senior remarked, "It is such a tradition here to be a Ram and you appreciate that coming in. But once you are here awhile, you start to understand more what this is about and the impact it has on people. You become proud of being a "Genuine Ram" (personal communication, February 19, 2008).
After discussing the prominent cultural artifacts, the researcher asked the students to describe how they learned the meanings of these artifacts. The students responded that they learned the significance of these through orientation, participating in campus tours, and living in the residence halls. During these activities, the orientation leaders indicated that cultural artifacts and their meanings were frequently but informally discussed. This was a slightly different answer than the director who responded that artifacts were intentionally incorporated into the program’s themes. A female junior remarked, “I think a lot of this is intentional and unintentional. Our director trains us on what to cover, but at the same time, I think it depends on the individual leader about what they will cover with their group. Everyone has their own styles and experiences they like to share” (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

The students indicated that they personally communicated the meanings of cultural artifacts to new students, but that this happened mostly through conversations. A male junior remarked, “Depending on the group I have, there may be certain issues that they are more interested in than others. So once I get to learn more about my group, I can have personal conversations to help answer more about what they want to know about PU including things like artifacts” (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

As for the messages cultural artifacts sent to new students at PU, the orientation leaders focused on the stories that are passed on during campus tours at orientation. Since some new students may be anxious at orientation and afraid to interact with new people, the orientation leaders felt that the tour was one way of making students relax and really get a sense of the school at the same time. A male senior commented, “We tell so many stories during the tour that are not true, but it makes the students laugh and start to feel
connected here. At the end of the tour, they are disappointed that the stories are made up but their minds are no longer worrying about whether they will meet friends or fit in here” (personal communication February 19, 2008). The orientation leaders did note that the size of the institution could appear “big” at first to new students and, therefore, send a negative message to new students. The orientation leaders pointed to the size of the campus as a bit intimidating, but noted that once students attend orientation, and participated in a tour with their leaders, they would feel much more comfortable with the university.

**Observations of Orientation Leader Training**

In February of 2008, the researcher observed an orientation leader training session at PU (see Appendix E). The session was led by two returning orientation leaders who were training four prospective orientation leaders on how to give campus tours at orientation. Although students may receive a tour through a separate office prior to attending the university, all students who attend orientation receive a three hour campus tour from an orientation leader. Typically, there are 18-20 students in a tour group led by two orientation leaders.

The orientation leaders started the training by talking about the structure of the campus tour. They mentioned that the tour would start with discussing the symbolism of a campus artifact donated to the university in 1984 by the alumni association and would conclude with walking through a building that houses the university’s athletics trophies. Throughout the tour, the two senior orientation leaders mentioned that there should be a mix of academic information with fun folklore and stories mixed in. The student leaders also pointed out key buildings that should be mentioned to all new students. The student
union, the student health center, a classroom building, and a main administrative building, were a few of the places pointed out. The names of some of the buildings were discussed by the orientation leaders, noting they are named after alumni of the institution who were influential. In addition to prominent alumni, the orientation leaders pointed to places on the campus that were public forums where influential public figures had spoken throughout the institution's history. Clearly, according to the orientation leaders, influential individuals were considered cultural artifacts at PU.

While walking across the campus, the returning orientation leaders greeted many people. One of the orientation leaders commented, "It is okay to wave and say hello to your friends while giving a tour. This actually makes your group of students feel better and not so overwhelmed by the size of this place" (personal communication, February 2008). The other leader added, "Even though this place is big, there is still community here. We have something for everyone to do here. You can find your niche" (personal communication, February 19, 2008). The senior orientation leaders talked about the fun competition between the north and south parts of campus. Part of the competition is academic, in that, certain majors are located on either side, but the other part had to do with the physical beauty of the campus since one side is more aesthetic overall.

Several times during the tour, the returning orientation leaders told the group that it was okay to be creative when pointing out certain buildings and landmarks on the campus. For example, there is a fountain that appears to be shaped like a toilet. One story about why the fountain was designed that way is due to a disgruntled PU dropout who was hired to design the fountain and he intentionally designed it to look like a toilet. An academic building was pointed out and the story was told that when the building was
constructed, the direction it faced created a glare on the highway, causing accidents. The university was warned to do something about the building so a group of architects and astronauts rotated the building little by little. Once again, this was a story with no truth to it but that adds to campus myths. While the stories were funny, the senior orientation leaders noted the importance of discussing the strong academics of the institution. One of the orientation leaders remarked, “The mention of top ranked academic programs get students excited. It makes them feel that they are attending a special institution” (personal communication, February 2008).

Toward the end of the tour, the orientation leaders stopped in front of Grand Hall, the university’s signature building. One of the orientation leaders remarked, “This is the place where students and parents take pictures after graduation. The building symbolizes the great tradition and legacy of this university. It represents the academic spirit of this place,” (personal communication, February 19, 2008). The soon to be orientation leaders were instructed to focus on this building and allow students to spend a few minutes gazing at it during orientation.

The final stop on the training tour was the athletic center which housed over 100 trophies from all of the institution’s sports teams. During the orientation campus tours, students get to walk through the trophy room and see symbols of accomplishments of teams such as basketball, football, baseball, water polo, and volleyball. Even students who are not sports fans get a sense of the importance of athletics to this institution and what it means to be a “Genuine Ram”. The trophies are cultural artifacts that symbolize traditions of excellence and a sense of inspiration to the students.
The training concluded with a discussion about students' reactions to finding out that many of the stories they heard about the campus were actually myths. One of the orientation leaders remarked, "Some students will be really disappointed after they finish the tour and find out that none of these things are true. It is important to show them that it is a tradition to pass on these stories. It's what makes this place so great and unique" (personal communication, February 19, 2008). Upon completion of the tour, it is common for students to try and figure out what was folklore and what is actually true about what they were told by the orientation leaders. One of the orientation leaders remarked, "These stories are fun and are at the heart of orientation leaders. As a leader, you get to pass these stories on and even add to them. This is what makes being an orientation leader so great....these stories are reserved specifically for us to tell" (personal communication, February 19, 2008).

During the training session observed by the researcher, several references were made to cultural artifacts at PU. While the orientation director was not present for the extended campus tour training, the returning orientation leaders intentionally discussed cultural artifacts with the prospective orientation leaders. Throughout the training, it was clear that the stories and myths about the campus were the foundation of the tour. These cultural artifacts were viewed as special by the orientation leaders in the focus group interview and this was apparent in the training. Based on the observations of this session, the director's view that the meanings of artifacts are shared was supported.

The program handbook distributed to new students featured several of the cultural artifacts discussed by the orientation director and orientation leaders in great detail. Campus traditions, institutional history, school colors, mascots, architecture, language,
and other cultural artifacts were featured in the handbook. While the main emphasis of the handbook appeared to be on the importance of academic resources available to new students, cultural artifacts appeared throughout its pages. The “Genuine Ram” pamphlet focused strictly on academic information, but the term was used heavily throughout the guide as a form of lingo and symbolism as to what it means to be a “genuine” student at PU.

In the orientation leader training syllabus, there were multiple topics devoted to campus traditions at PU. The orientation director believed that communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts was part of the training and that this happened intentionally through planned efforts devoting sessions to such issues. At the campus tour training session observed by the researcher (see Appendix E), the meanings of cultural artifacts, particularly architecture, symbols, and legendary stories and myths were communicated to orientation leaders. On the orientation program’s website, however, although there were photos of a prominent campus walkway and Joyce Hall, that both had stories attached to them that the orientation leaders discussed, there was no other mention of cultural artifacts. Instead, the website featured information about academic services and resources for students.
CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This chapter offers summaries of the case studies presented in Chapter 4 and then revisits the study’s research questions in an attempt to provide answers using a cross-case analysis (see Appendix D). The analysis was framed based on the research questions in this study that addressed five areas of inquiry: 1) the role of orientation directors in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 2) the role of orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students; 3) the extent to which meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated in orientation leader trainings and new student orientations; 4) the extent to which physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts are appropriate; and 5) the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students. To construct the analysis, open, axial, and selective coding led to the emerging categories (see Appendix B) in each of the cases (see Appendix C) which were compared to add to the rigor of this study (Yin, 2003).

Case 1: Downtown University Summary

Erin, the orientation director at DU, did not think she had a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, but that the orientation leaders did this at new student orientation. While she indicated that she did not intentionally
incorporate cultural artifacts and their meanings into her orientation leader training, at the session observed by the researcher, Erin made specific mention to cultural artifacts including the school’s history and physical setting. Moreover, the orientation leader course syllabus featured a session later in the semester devoted to the institution’s history. It was possible that although the orientation director referred to cultural artifacts and their meanings, she was not aware of this and simply thought that the orientation leaders had a greater role in the process. The orientation director indicated to the researcher during the spring visit that since the initial fall visit, she was considering ways to incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts intentionally into her orientation leader training sessions because she thought they would bring an added value to the students.

The orientation leaders in the focus group believed they had roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, but that it happened mostly through informal conversations at orientation. During the observation of the training session however, an activity conducted by two orientation leaders appeared to focus on cultural artifacts such as the school’s history, physical setting, and influential alums and their meanings. While the purpose of the exercise was to test the orientation leaders’ knowledge about DU, the meanings of cultural artifacts were emphasized.

In the documents reviewed prior to visiting the institution, the orientation unit website contained mostly academic information, but had two photos of prominent buildings that the participants referenced. In the orientation packet, there was a brochure highlighting some of the famous alumni who attended the school as well as referencing the importance of campus traditions. This finding supported the orientation leaders’ feedback about influential individuals as heroes and heroines. The other materials in the packet however
pertained to academic services and resources. During the spring visit to DU, the researcher obtained a copy of an orientation leader training syllabus. Although the orientation director noted that communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts was not an intended goal of the orientation leader training, the syllabus featured one session devoted to discussing the institution’s history and influential individuals.

At the orientation leader training observed by the researcher, the orientation director’s presentation and the student leader group activities referenced cultural artifacts including the school’s history, physical setting, and prominent alumni. Even though it was not the intent of the orientation director, cultural artifacts and their meanings were incorporated into the training session observed by the researcher.

Case 2: Scholarly University Summary

Communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to new students was considered important from the perspectives of the orientation director and orientation leaders at SU. All of the participants interviewed, including the orientation director, were genuinely excited when talking about the physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts at the university. The researcher also observed that the meanings of cultural artifacts were addressed to some extent in the orientation leader training led by professional staff members and students. In an orientation guide given to new students attending orientation, there were several references to the school’s cultural artifacts including traditions, language, physical setting, and history.

As for the roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, both the orientation director and orientation leaders believed that they did this directly and
indirectly. According to the director and the orientation leaders, the campus tours at new student orientation were an intentional process in which the meanings of artifacts were communicated. The orientation leaders reflected on their own orientation experiences and pointed to the campus tours as one of the most memorable and informative parts of new student orientation. As an alumnus, the orientation director felt she was able to share her personal experiences as a student with the orientation leaders and was more apt to discuss the meanings of cultural artifacts. The orientation leaders agreed with the director that sharing personal experiences with students was another way in which they passed on the meanings of campus traditions, stories, or other artifacts to new students. While some of this sharing happened informally, at the orientation leader training observed by the researcher, the meanings of cultural artifacts appeared to be communicated intentionally in the role-play exercise about using inclusive language when discussing off-campus neighborhoods with new students.

According to the orientation director and orientation leaders, some cultural artifacts were so important at SU that other campus personnel such as resident assistants, academic advisors, and faculty have roles in communicating the meanings to students. For example, when it came to the school’s rival, all of the members of the campus community had a role in discussing the significance of the rivalry with new students. The rivalry inspired traditions that united the campus whether through an annual football game or forbidding one another from wearing clothing in the rival school’s colors.

At the training session observed by the researcher (see Appendix C), the meanings of cultural artifacts, particularly language and symbols, were communicated. Researcher observations revealed a close-knit orientation program in which the orientation director,
professional staff, and orientation leaders all appeared to have strong family like relationships. These individuals were clearly passionate about their university and felt fortunate to be part of such a prestigious place and beautiful campus. In many respects, it seemed that the director, staff, and student leaders were part of the orientation program because this was one way they could give back to the university.

One of the documents collected during the spring visit to SU was an orientation leader training syllabus in which there were two topics listed in future sessions related to cultural artifacts. One of the sessions was about campus traditions and another session was on the importance of campus tours at new student orientation. The orientation director believed that communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts was part of the training and that this happened both formally and informally through planned lectures or open-ended discussions. On the orientation program’s website however, with the exception of a photo of prominent building the orientation leaders discussed, there was no mention of cultural artifacts. Instead, the website featured information about academic services and resources for students. While the orientation guide reflected the orientation director and orientation leaders’ perspectives of prominent artifacts at SU, the program’s website did not adequately feature the artifacts discussed.

Case 3: Tech University Summary

Based on the data collected, the orientation director and orientation leaders at TU had different views on how the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to new students at the university. Andrea, the orientation director, was unsure if it happened and, if it did, how it happened. She also believed that she did not have a role in
communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts. Despite being an alumnus, she struggled to think of prominent cultural artifacts at TU. She thought that the orientation leaders would be able to provide more insight. Orientation program documents collected did not make specific reference to cultural artifacts, supporting the director’s views. The orientation leaders reacted completely differently from the orientation director in citing verbal artifacts such as the use of language and mottos were important to the orientation leaders in communicating with new students. Without such terminology, the orientation leaders thought there would not be the same sense of community that existed at the school.

Conversations with orientation leaders revealed that it was through campus tours during new student orientation that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated. Although the tours were a formal process with specific information to be shared with new students, the orientation leaders thought that the meanings of artifacts were communicated informally. The informal conversations often consisted of the orientation leaders sharing personal experiences that involved cultural artifacts with new students. While the director was not as familiar with any of the artifacts, she and the students agreed that the physical setting and location of the campus was very influential in attracting and retaining students.

While acknowledging that they felt part of the university and local communities, the participants with whom the researcher met indicated that belonging to the orientation program had special meaning to them. The orientation director and orientation leaders described the individuals in the orientation program and at the university as friendly and welcoming. The family like atmosphere also extended into the surrounding college town.
Some of the orientation leaders talked about participating in what they considered off-campus traditions including annual community events such as town clean-ups and festivals. The mix of on-campus, off-campus, and orientation program traditions were unique in that they were all important in the discussions of prominent cultural artifacts at TU. While other traditions were discussed, the director and orientation leaders emphasized the importance of orientation program traditions.

The documents collected at TU supported some of the cultural artifacts described by the orientation leaders. While the handbook featured mostly academic information and resources for parents, the book did feature information about orientation program and off-campus traditions. Program and off-campus traditions were featured in the documents, but there were no references to on-campus traditions. This finding would support the participants’ perspectives that program and off-campus traditions were prominent cultural artifacts at TU. The orientation leader training syllabus did not feature sessions that focused on the meanings of cultural artifacts. On the orientation program’s website, besides the program traditions, there was no mention of cultural artifacts. Instead, the website featured information about academic services and resources for students. Overall, the documents reviewed reflected the orientation director’s perspectives about the lack of cultural artifacts at the university. In contrast, the documents did not reflect the perspectives of the student orientation leaders who felt there were several cultural artifacts at the university that were significant.
Case 4: Pride University Summary

The orientation director felt very strongly about her role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to new students at PU. As an alumnus, Nicole reflected on her own student experiences and pointed to them as to why she intentionally incorporated the meanings of cultural artifacts into orientation program activities. In the orientation leader training and new student orientation sessions, the director purposely devoted time to emphasize key traditions, language, and symbols at PU. Through collaborative efforts with a dean, the director presented a workshop on what it meant to be a true PU student and what was valued at the school. For the most part, the orientation leaders agreed with the director that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated intentionally, mostly through campus tours at new student orientation. The orientation leaders acknowledged, however, that some of the meanings were communicated unintentionally in personal interactions with students through various orientation activities.

The orientation leaders, similar to the director, were enthusiastic and expressed great pride when discussing the cultural artifacts at their school. Stories and myths are the most prominent cultural artifacts at PU. In many ways, the stories and myths were used, in a fun way, to create a common bond for all students. At new student orientation, the orientation leaders provide an extended three-hour tour to new students. The centerpiece of the tours was these stories and myths about campus buildings, individuals, history, and other artifacts. According to the orientation leaders, at the conclusion of the tour, new students are disappointed when they find out some of the information is false and made up, but these stories continued to get passed on. The opportunity to get to share these stories with first-year students during orientation was one of the reasons for being an
orientation leader. The orientation leaders considered these stories especially reserved for them to pass on to new students.

All of the participants interviewed at PU talked about the pride they had in their institution. The orientation director reflected on her own undergraduate experiences as a PU student and credited that as part of the reason for pursuing a career at the institution. Similar to the orientation director at SU, she felt she was able to relate well to the current students because of the familiar cultural artifacts. The documents collected from the orientation program included an orientation handbook, orientation leader training syllabus, and a pamphlet describing the “Genuine Ram” honor code. All of these documents emphasized some of the school’s cultural artifacts including architecture, colors, symbols, and the institution’s history. Overall, the documents reviewed reflected the orientation director and orientation leaders’ perceptions of cultural artifacts at the university.

Research Question 1

What perceptions do orientation directors have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?

The four orientation directors perceived their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts differently (see Figure 2). While two of the orientation directors in this study, SU and PU, identified having active roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, the directors at DU and TU did not think they did this or that it was part of their roles. Although these two orientation directors did not believe they had a role in this process, all four of the directors agreed that orientation
leaders had a greater role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. As a result of this finding, orientation leaders were added as participants to the study and interviewed during the spring return visits. All of the orientation directors clarified that most of their student contact was with orientation leaders whom they selected, trained, and supervised, and not with first-year students. Nevertheless, the directors were responsible for the planning and coordination of new student orientation sessions and therefore they were involved with first-year students even if they did not interact with them directly.

Three of the orientation directors were alumni of their institutions and two of them, SU and PU, felt that this helped them in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to students. As alums, they were able to share their personal campus experiences. The directors noted that many of the same cultural artifacts were still relevant despite the gap between generations and that the alum status was beneficial to their roles in training orientation leaders and planning orientation activities. Above all, the directors' undergraduate experiences helped them develop an affinity for their institutions and made them want to give back in their current roles as orientation directors. While the director at TU was an alumnus, she did not feel she had a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts at her institution and that there were a lack of artifacts at her campus. She thought there was a lack of cultural artifacts at the school while the orientation leaders' perspectives completely differed. The orientation leaders excitedly discussed the meanings of cultural artifacts at TU demonstrating their passion for their school. Although the orientation director at TU felt strongly that she did not have a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, this finding was still surprising because
of the director's alumnus status. The other two orientation directors who were alums, SU and PU, felt strongly about their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts and described multiple artifacts at their universities.

Though the orientation directors at DU and TU did not identify having roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, they were able to point to general roles that they considered imperative to their positions. The orientation directors cited professional development, in the form of their involvement with the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA), as important to their roles as orientation directors. Participating in NODA allowed the orientation directors to stay current in the field of orientation as well as collaborate with professionals at other institutions to share best practices. Through attending regional and national conferences and workshops, the orientation directors found resources and support for addressing issues facing their own programs and institutions, as well as opportunities for professional growth in their careers. One of the orientation directors, Andrea at TU, was a former president of NODA and discussed how the experience continued to shape her career positively both in the field and at her institution. All of the orientation directors pointed to their professional development in NODA as helping them become more effective orientation directors because of the opportunities the association provided to share best practices with orientation colleagues at other institutions.
Research Question 2

What perceptions do orientation leaders have of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities?

The four groups of orientation leaders described their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students similarly (see Figure 2). The orientation leaders cited extended campus tours, sharing personal experiences, facilitating informal conversations, and leading with honesty and enthusiasm as all ways in which they communicated the meanings of cultural artifacts to students during orientation. All of the orientation programs featured extended campus tours that, according to the orientation leaders, were the opportunity for which the meanings of cultural artifacts were passed on to new students. Depending on the orientation program, the orientation leaders guided tours that ranged from one to three hours. Campus tours have been described as influential rituals in communicating an institution's values (Magolda, 2000; 2001). Although the orientation leaders did not describe the tours as rituals, they explained the differences between campus tours at new student orientation from general campus tours given to prospective students. These tours gave the orientation leaders opportunities to point out prominent and historic buildings, tell campus myths, discuss school traditions, introduce students to common language used at their institutions, and describe other cultural artifacts at the institution. The orientation leaders at PU shared myths about the campus throughout the tour. Even though the stories were false, the orientation leaders believed new students would feel more relaxed and comfortable at orientation and would still remember the stories in the future when walking through campus. It was also

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important to the orientation leaders that they reserved the right to share these stories and add their own twists when giving tours to new students at orientation.

Based on the perspectives of the orientation leaders, it seemed that the orientation campus tours were used as a tool to introduce students to the cultural artifacts of their new institutions. Without the tours and the stories told along the way, buildings would be just buildings and nothing more. Students would pass by a statue of a prominent individual in the school’s history, and have no idea the significance of it. The orientation campus tours were an opportunity for orientation leaders to ease students’ fears about transitioning into a new environment at a large campus. While pointing out where the bookstore, dining center, financial aid office, and academic advising center may have made students feel more comfortable, the orientation leaders did acknowledge that the tours at orientation provided one of the first opportunities to begin communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to students. Many of the orientation directors in this study agreed with the orientation leaders views that campus tours were influential in this process.

During the orientation tours, many of the orientation leaders acknowledged that the tours were one of several opportunities at orientation in which they were able to share their own personal experiences with new students. The orientation leaders at PU and TU felt that sharing their personal experiences as students was part of their role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to new students at their institutions. Personal experiences included the orientation leaders reflecting on their own orientation experiences, describing class experiences with particular professors, and talking about what it was like to live on or off-campus. If the topics came up, it was possible for the
orientation leaders to talk about participating in campus traditions or the meanings of words used by students. The orientation leaders indicated that these conversations could happen at any point throughout the orientation sessions because of the small group atmosphere and long hours spent with the same people. Although sharing these experiences could happen informally, the orientation leaders at PU and TU indicated that this sharing was purposeful in an attempt to make students feel welcomed and connected. Like the orientation leaders at the other universities, SU’s students described their roles in facilitating informal conversations and campus tours, but they also noted the importance of using all encompassing language when working with new students. They felt using language that was sensitive to all groups was part of their role in effectively communicating the meanings of artifacts to new students.

According to the orientation leaders, behavioral artifacts such as traditions and rituals were mostly shared in informal conversations with students throughout orientation. The orientation leaders acknowledged that even if the conversations were informal, it was their role to facilitate these discussions since they were familiar with the meanings of artifacts at their institutions. At SU and PU, the orientation leaders interviewed noted that being able to give campus tours was one of the reasons they applied to become orientation leaders. Spending time in small groups with new students gave the orientation leaders great opportunities to facilitate these informal conversations and share personal experiences as they related to cultural artifacts. For the most part, the orientation leaders thought that the meanings of artifacts were shared informally, not quite by accident, but not prearranged either. While the orientation leaders were instructed to cover particular details on the campus tours, some of which included addressing physical artifacts, the
orientation leaders pointed to having a role in facilitating informal conversations with new students that at times, may have referenced cultural artifacts. Since new students were anxious about transitioning into a different environment, the orientation leaders felt it was their role to take the initiative and share personal experiences to help students feel more comfortable.

The orientation leaders identified enthusiasm as influential to their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. When discussing cultural artifacts at the campus, whether on a campus tour or in an informal conversation, the orientation leaders tried to be as enthusiastic as possible to show new students how much they loved their institutions. Regardless whether it was beloved campus traditions, fun-filled myths, or background about the school’s history, the students at all four schools pointed to leading with enthusiasm as an important part of their roles. The orientation leaders noted that showing enthusiasm could be influential to how new students perceive their orientation experience and the universities as a whole. SU’s orientation leaders referred to the drain of working long days and hours filled with countless activities that may not always work out as planned, but that it was important to continue to show enthusiasm to new students because of the influence on their impressions of the university.
Research Question 3

To what extent are the meanings of cultural artifacts addressed in orientation leader trainings and new student orientations at four public universities?

Depending on the campus, the extent that the meanings of cultural artifacts were addressed in orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions varied. Two of the orientation directors, DU and TU, were unsure of the extent that this happened in their orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. Both orientation directors acknowledged that orientation leaders were more likely to have roles in this process than themselves and the extent these things were communicated could vary. During the observations (see Appendix E) of the orientation leader trainings at DU and
TU, cultural artifacts were discussed to some extent by both the director and student leaders.

The orientation directors at SU and PU thought that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to a high extent in their orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. At both institutions, the orientation directors pointed to the activities led by orientation leaders and professional staff during both the trainings and orientation sessions. Both orientation directors acknowledged that the meanings of cultural artifacts could be communicated informally, but they felt their orientation sessions intentionally incorporated artifacts meanings into the tours and presentations at their universities.

During the observations (see Appendix E) of the orientation leader trainings at each university, cultural artifacts were discussed to a high extent. Physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were pointed out in several activities during the trainings.

All four groups of orientation leaders thought it was difficult to determine the exact extent that cultural artifacts meanings were communicated to new students at orientation because of the large number of students in attendance. The orientation leaders at DU agreed with their director that communicating the meanings of artifacts occurred informally at orientation. They also reported that they were unsure of the extent this happened because it depended on the individual leader and group of students attending orientation. The orientation leaders at SU and PU agreed with their orientation directors that artifacts meanings were communicated to a high extent in both informal conversations and formal campus tours.

At TU, the orientation leaders’ perceptions differed with their director in that they thought the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to a high extent and
formally at their orientation sessions. Although the orientation leaders acknowledged that informal conversations may occur in which the meanings of artifacts are discussed, they felt that the orientation leaders make a conscious and purposeful effort to share these things with new students throughout orientation activities including campus tours.

Some participants had difficulty determining the extent to which the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to first-year students at their institutions. In two cases, DU, and TU, there were differing perspectives between the orientation directors and orientation leaders about the extent that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated. It is difficult to be certain about why these differing views existed, although it may have had to do with nature of the contact orientation leaders have working with new students as opposed to orientation directors. Since both the orientation directors and orientation leaders interviewed agreed that it was the orientation leaders who had more of a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, this may have influenced the differences in responses. The student orientation leaders may have felt stronger that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to a high extent because they were the ones doing it in their roles.

At SU and PU, the orientation directors and student orientation leaders shared similar views about the extent to which the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to first-year students. The participants at these schools felt this occurred to a high extent in orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. In these cases, the orientation directors pointed to processes including campus tours and informal conversations facilitated by orientation leaders, but they also felt that as orientation directors, they purposely incorporated the meanings of cultural artifacts into their
orientation programs. The orientation directors discussed presentations led by professional staff in which the meanings of artifacts were incorporated intentionally. One director viewed it as her responsibility not only to incorporate artifacts into the orientation planning process, but also into the student orientation leader training sessions.

In the orientation leader training sessions observed by the researcher (see Appendix E), the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated. Depending on the training, this happened directly or indirectly. At DU, SU, and PU, specific activities were devoted to teaching the orientation leaders about key cultural artifacts at their universities. At DU, the orientation director gave a presentation on the history of new student orientation and NODA and what this meant to the students as orientation leaders. She also included information about the history of the school and of the orientation program. Later in the training, two students led a trivia game activity in which the orientation leaders broke into groups and competed to answer questions about the school’s history, influential alums, buildings, and other cultural artifacts. During this same training session, the school’s president talked about the importance of the school’s location, physical setting, and symbolism to the community, and DU’s commitment to excellence.

Research Question 4

To what extent are physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts appropriate categories in discussing cultural artifacts at four public universities; Are there any additional categories of artifacts?

Kuh and Hall’s (1993) three categories of cultural artifacts, physical, verbal, and behavioral, were all appropriate categories in discussing these issues with the four
orientation directors and four groups of orientation leaders. Although certain categories of artifacts were emphasized more frequently, all of the categories were acknowledged by the participants (see Figure 3). Two orientation directors, DU and PU, described the architecture of the buildings, the physical setting of their campuses, and the significance of their institutions’ histories. The director at TU did not discuss campus architecture, but did discuss the influence of the school’s physical setting. SU’s director was the only participant not to discuss physical artifacts at her university. Instead, she described language and symbols as prominent artifacts that everyone in the community knew. PU’s director agreed that language and symbols were prominent artifacts at her institution, but the campus architecture ultimately was the most influential artifact at her school. The orientation directors at DU and TU did not discuss verbal artifacts at their schools in much detail, although they did reference the symbolism of fight songs at sporting events.

The groups of orientation leaders discussed the categories of cultural artifacts to different extents. In some cases, the orientation leaders emphasized certain categories of cultural artifacts more than the orientation directors did at their institutions. At TU, the director described the school’s physical setting as an artifact, while the orientation leaders focused more on the behavioral and verbal artifacts, including traditions and language. There was also a difference in the emphasis on artifacts between the director and orientation leaders at SU. The director discussed verbal and behavioral artifacts at the school, while the orientation leaders emphasized the influential campus architecture and its significance to the school’s history. Part of these differences in perspectives could be attributed to the orientation directors’ viewpoints of their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts. For example, the orientation directors at DU and TU
considered communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to be the role of orientation leaders. While the orientation directors at SU and PU agreed that orientation leaders had a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, the directors acknowledged that they too had an active role in this process.

The orientation directors and orientation leaders at PU emphasized the same categories of artifacts and even shared some of the same examples. Physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were all addressed in the discussion with the orientation leaders. While the students named several prominent artifacts and explained their significance to the campus, the history of the university was not discussed, nor were influential individuals such as heroes and heroines. There was similar agreement between the director and orientation leaders at DU in regards to the categories of artifacts that were most appropriate. The orientation leaders emphasized the campus architecture and its connection to the institution's history, but they also discussed influential alumni as heroes and heroines who they felt were part of the school's rich cultural background.

While physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were appropriate categories for discussing artifacts with the orientation directors and orientation leaders at these four universities, two types of artifacts, rivalries and athletics resurfaced throughout the discussion (see Figure 3). While these artifacts may be related, it is also possible for each of them to stand alone. The director and orientation leaders at DU did not mention any rivalry with another school, but they did talk about athletics serving as a tradition at the university and famous sports figures who were alumni. Similarly, TU’s director and orientation leaders discussed the important role athletics plays in creating traditions for
the orientation program and school, but only one student referenced the school having a rival for an annual football game.

The orientation directors and orientation leaders at SU and PU, however, made several references to rivals and athletics at their schools when discussing cultural artifacts. They acknowledged that the rivalries started as athletics based, but then grew to have bigger connotations including which school had the better students, the nicer campus, and better resources. Both the orientation directors and orientation leaders described the playfulness and spiritedness of the rivalries, but also added that no student, staff, or faculty member should wear the rival’s colors the week of a big game or they would be heckled. At both schools, the orientation leaders described the influence the rivalries had in conjuring up negative views of the institutions, even if they had friends that went to school there.

At PU, the orientation program featured the success of its athletics teams in a campus tour that takes the students to a building with a room dedicated to housing athletic trophies. The orientation leaders shared that students get inspired after seeing all of these symbols of accomplishments, even if they are not athletes or interested in athletics. The director felt the success of the athletics teams helped establish pride and tradition at the school. Instead of having to create traditions or new artifacts, athletics provided a recognizable and prominent tradition that had people interested in PU before they ever stepped foot on campus.
Research Question 5

What perceptions do orientation directors and orientation leaders have of the messages cultural artifacts send to first-year students at four public universities?

The participants described cultural artifacts that sent positive and negative messages to new students at their institutions (Banning & Bartels, 1993; 1997; Banning & Luna, 1992). In each case study, the orientation directors and student orientation leaders differed in their responses about what they considered to be positive and negative cultural artifacts (see Figure 4). The director at PU and the student orientation leaders at DU indicated that they could not think of any artifacts that sent negative messages to new students. The student orientation leaders at PU thought the size of the institution could be considered a negative artifact although they indicated that this feeling would change once the students attended orientation and participated in the campus tour. At DU, the director referred to a lack of parking as an artifact that continued to send a negative message to
students. While she was unsure if a lack of parking could be considered an artifact, she stressed that the message being sent to commuter students by the university was a negative one.

The director at TU felt the physical setting of her campus sent a positive message to students but, that overall, there were a lack of cultural artifacts at the campus. The orientation leaders disagreed that there were a lack of cultural artifacts at the university. They pointed to off-campus traditions as artifacts that sent positive messages to students strengthening their connection to the local town. The orientation leaders also discussed language as a verbal artifact that made students, including themselves, feel welcomed and included at orientation. One area that they may have agreed with the director was that there was a lack of signature building on the campus. Although the director did not mention this specifically, she did indicate that there was a lack of artifacts at the university.

At SU, the director and student orientation leaders both talked about heroes and heroines, but in different contexts. The director described faculty as influential individuals who inspired students to do great things at the university. The student orientation leaders referred to pop culture icons as heroes that sent a negative message to students. The orientation leaders explained that some famous individuals associated with SU received more attention and were better known than were the influential individuals who founded the school. Both the director and orientation leaders described individuals as artifacts, but that the faculty sent a positive message while the pop culture icons sent a negative message to students. While the director did not describe physical artifacts in detail, the student orientation leaders pointed to the physical setting and campus
architecture as artifacts that sent positive messages to students. The messages included ones of inspiration and gratitude for being part of the university. The orientation director was offended however by the use of the words “Asian ghetto” and the message that sent to first-year students and others in the university community. It should be noted that there were no examples of such insensitivity in any of the observations conducted by the researcher or in any of the documents collected from the institutions including SU.

Overall, the data revealed differences between the orientation directors and orientation leaders’ perceptions of the messages sent to first-year students by artifacts at their campuses. Despite these differences, the participants cited more examples of cultural artifacts that sent positive messages as opposed to artifacts that sent negative messages (Banning & Bartels, 1993; 1997; Banning & Luna, 1992). Not all of the participants however indicated that cultural artifacts could send negative messages to students.

Figure 4: Messages Sent by Cultural Artifacts

MESSAGES SENT BY CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

ORIENTATION DIRECTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF MESSAGES

NEGATIVE MESSAGES

RACIALLY INSENSITIVE LANGUAGE

POSITIVE MESSAGES

FACULTY AS HEROES

ORIENTATION LEADERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF MESSAGES

NEGATIVE MESSAGES

POP CULTURE ICONS AS HEROES; NOT UNIVERSITY FOUNDERS

POSITIVE MESSAGES

TROPHIES AS SYMBOLS OF PRIDE AND INSPIRATION

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CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how orientation directors and orientation leaders perceive their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students at four public universities. Chapter 1 provided the background for the dissertation and stated the research questions. The next chapter reviewed the literature and presented a conceptual framework of cultural artifacts. Literature was included on cultural perspectives in higher education, the significance of cultural artifacts on college campuses, campus ecology and studies of cultural artifacts, a historical context of orientation programs, and first-year students' experiences. Chapter 3 detailed the qualitative research methods and the multiple case study design used for the study. The fourth chapter presented the findings from the four individual cases: Downtown University; Scholarly University; Tech University; and Pride University. The fifth chapter revisited the research questions and conceptual framework to construct a cross-case analysis of the findings from the individual cases. This final chapter offers a summary of the findings, a discussion of implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research, and a conclusion.
Summary of Findings

The four orientation directors pointed to student orientation leaders as having a greater role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. Based on this finding, orientation leaders were added as participants in this study. All four groups of orientation leaders viewed their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts similarly. In all four cases, the orientation leaders identified common roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts including serving as campus tour guides to new students at orientation, sharing personal experiences and facilitating informal conversations, and leading with honesty and enthusiasm.

Two of the orientation directors, SU and PU, thought they had active roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students and pointed to their alumni status as influential in this process. The orientation directors at DU and TU, however, did not consider themselves to have a role in this process nor did they believe it was part of their responsibilities. Though the orientation directors' perspectives differed on their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, they identified general roles of their positions including professional development and involvement in NODA, collaborating with multiple units at their institutions and increasing awareness of technology issues facing students. Although these roles did not directly involve cultural artifacts, this feedback was helpful in understanding more about the orientation directors' responsibilities and perspectives on critical issues in the field.

The orientation directors and orientation leaders offered different perspectives on the extent that the meanings of cultural artifacts are communicated during orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. While four orientation leader training
sessions were observed, and the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to some extent, the responses of the orientation directors and orientation leaders were also considered to address this issue. At SU, TU, and PU, the orientation leaders felt the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated to a high extent during orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. The orientation directors at SU and PU agreed with their students that this was the case, while the orientation directors at DU and TU were unsure the extent that this happened. This finding was not surprising considering the directors at DU and TU did not think they had a role in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, whereas the directors at SU and PU considered themselves to have active roles in this process.

Physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were all appropriate categories in discussing these issues with the four orientation directors and four groups of orientation leaders. While these categories were appropriate for discussing cultural artifacts during the interviews with the orientation directors and orientation leaders, two types of artifacts resurfaced throughout the discussion. Rivalries and athletic events were discussed by the participants in this study. Although attending football games or not wearing the colors of school rivalries could be viewed as behavioral artifacts, the discussions referred more to the importance of these things as affective artifacts. According to the orientation leaders and orientation directors, even members of the campus community who were not sports fans knew what the rivalries symbolized at the institutions. Students who were fans of their athletic teams and attended sporting events viewed the teams' accomplishments as extensions of themselves, symbolizing the pride they felt toward their institutions. This was particularly the case at PU where students who toured a building dedicated to
housing athletic trophies were inspired by these accomplishments and recognized the great traditions at the school.

The perceptions of the orientation directors and orientation leaders differed on the messages sent by cultural artifacts to first-year students. The student orientation leaders at PU thought the size of the institution could be considered a negative artifact, while the orientation director thought there were no artifacts that sent negative messages. At DU, the orientation director referred to a lack of parking as a negative message to commuter students, while the orientation leaders indicated there were no negative artifacts at the school. The director at TU felt the physical setting of her campus sent a positive message to students, while the student orientation leaders though that a lack of a signature building, sent a negative message. Another conflicting finding in which the orientation director and orientation leaders offered differing perspectives on the messages sent by cultural artifacts was at SU. The orientation director cited insensitive language as a negative artifact, while the orientation leaders referred to inclusive language as a positive artifact. This finding was interesting because the orientation leaders, who generally agreed with may of the orientation directors' perspectives, did not seem to find the insensitive language offensive, and instead talked about the use of inclusive language.

Implications

Implications for Theory

In Chapter 2, a conceptual framework was provided that identified Kuh and Hall’s (1993) three categories of cultural artifacts: physical, verbal, and behavioral. Researchers have provided examples of cultural artifacts found at colleges and universities that fit into
these categories, including an institution's physical setting or architecture, traditions or rituals, language, symbols, heroes or heroines, and institutional history, also referred to as saga (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988;). Using Kuh and Hall's categories and the previously identified examples of cultural artifacts as a reference point, this study explored if the categories were still relevant from the perspectives of the orientation directors and orientation leaders or if there were any new categories or examples of cultural artifacts not identified previously in the literature.

The participants interviewed felt that physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts were appropriate categories in discussing cultural artifacts at their universities. While there were differing perspectives between the participants as to which categories of cultural artifacts were considered to be more prominent at their institutions, all three categories were acknowledged. Throughout the interviews with both the orientation directors and orientation leaders, rivalries and athletics were two themes that emerged in the discussions of prominent cultural artifacts at each of the universities. Although the influences of athletics in higher education have been previously considered (Thelin, 1994; Toma; 2003), athletics and rivalries have not been labeled as cultural artifacts. While attending a football game or participating in a homecoming parade prior to playing a school's rival could be examples of behavioral artifacts, in this study athletics and rivalries were identified more in affective contexts. For example, the orientation leaders at PU viewed the athletic teams' trophies on display as symbols of the school's commitment to excellence. According to the student leaders, students at the university took great pride in their athletic teams and the trophies even if they were not sports fans and did not attending the athletic events. This is an example in which a cultural artifact
did not provoke a certain behavior, but it did illicit an emotion, therefore, it could be considered affective.

The finding of rivalries and athletics as prominent cultural artifacts has implications to Kuh and Hall's three categories in that consideration should be given to a fourth category called "affective artifacts." Perhaps more importantly, the findings suggest that there should be an explicit method for labeling types of cultural artifacts. In Chapter 2, the example of an author referring to the beauty of a campus and its architecture could be labeled as a physical artifact, but it could also be referred to as a behavioral artifact depending on the context. This study argues that the beauty of a campus and its architecture, and other cultural artifacts such as rivalries and athletics, may simply provoke an emotion or feeling about one's institution, acting as affective artifacts. Adding to this point, a cultural artifact that could be considered physical, behavioral, and affective, should be labeled as such, in a fifth category referred to as "artifacts with multiple meanings or dimensions." As discussed in the review of literature chapter, an artifact may express multiple meanings or messages to students. One individual may find a campus mascot or logo offensive, while another member of the campus community may view the same symbol as having special meaning that expresses a positive message.

One may ask, "Why is developing a method to explicitly label cultural artifacts important?" The answer is three-fold in that having a method of labeling cultural artifacts at college campuses will have implications for: 1) individuals who are student affairs practitioners trying to identify and learn more about the cultural artifacts at their institutions; 2) administrators trying to incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts in their policies (i.e. incorporating the meanings of cultural artifacts in student orientation
leader trainings and new student orientation sessions; and 3) individuals wishing to conduct future research on cultural artifacts will have a framework for labeling types of cultural artifacts into appropriate categories (i.e. rivalries as affective artifacts or rivalries as behavioral artifacts or rivalries as multiple artifacts).

Although each practitioner and researcher may have a different purpose or interest in cultural artifacts, the findings of this study suggest that Kuh and Hall's (1993) framework, along with the types of cultural artifacts previously identified in the literature, are useful in explicitly labeling cultural artifacts. The figure presented in Chapter 1 was used as a reference point in identifying cultural artifacts found on college campuses. The findings in this study suggest that symbols are no longer just a type of cultural artifact, but, instead, should have a category to encompass items such as athletics, rivalries, school colors, and mascots on college campuses.

Implications for Practice

While one study cannot provide all of the insight into the roles of orientation directors and orientation leaders in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, the findings of this study would suggest individuals in these positions do have roles in this process, even if they are indirect ones. The implications of this study are important to orientation units since new student orientation is one of the first opportunities for institutions to acculturate first-year students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Orientation directors must take advantage of this opportunity and recognize how they can incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts into their new student orientation sessions. Since all four directors indicated that student orientation leaders had greater roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, and that this
happened during new student orientation, an intentional effort needs to be made to discuss the significance of artifacts in the orientation leader training sessions.

Although two of the orientation directors, SU and TU, perceived themselves to have active roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts the orientation directors at DU and TU did not perceive themselves as having roles. The orientation director at DU thought the meanings of cultural artifacts may come up indirectly in her position, but the director at TU was adamant that she did not have a role in this process nor was it important. While the orientation leaders interviewed at all four campuses were able to identify specific ways at new student orientation sessions such as campus tours, informal conversations, and sharing personal experiences, in which the meanings of artifacts were shared, the common response among the orientation leaders was that it happened informally. At DU, the orientation leaders suggested that the meanings of cultural artifacts would be communicated to new students depending on the particular leader. This supported the idea that the meanings of cultural artifacts were communicated informally, but the finding was more troubling in that it led to the issue of the training of orientation leaders. Establishing formal ways to communicate the meanings of cultural artifacts such as campus tours ensures that first-year students will begin to learn their significance while attending orientation.

Although the orientation directors at SU and PU indicated they made intentional efforts to incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts into orientation leader trainings, the directors at DU and TU did not, leaving it to chance that the orientation leaders at these schools would communicate the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. Regardless of whether the orientation directors perceived themselves to have roles in this
process or not, based on the conversations with them, they were not trained to do this as part of their responsibilities in their positions. Each director noted the importance of their involvement in NODA activities as influential to their roles as orientation director, but not in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts.

If orientation directors are not being trained to share the meanings of cultural artifacts and, in turn, only certain orientation leaders are doing this with new students at orientation, the implications of these findings are important to orientation directors and other student affairs practitioners. The lack of training may in turn be influencing students’ acculturation into their new environments, as well as their chances for success (Kuh & Associates, 2005). This is important since understanding the meanings of cultural artifacts can contribute to how students make sense of and learn the culture while adapting to a new environment (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Manning & Eaton, 1993).

According to the orientation leaders, extended campus tours, the sharing of personal experiences and informal conversations were all important to communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students in helping them become connected to their new institutions (Tinto, 1993). Since the orientation leaders perceived themselves to have roles in this process, it is the responsibility of the orientation directors to make a conscious effort to incorporate more opportunities, other than campus tours, for the student leaders to share their experiences with first-year students at orientation sessions. According to the orientation leaders, the sharing of these personal experiences is what seemed to be influential in helping new students feel comfortable when attending orientation.
A related implication for practice was the experiences of the orientation directors who were alumni of their institutions and the influences that status had to their roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to students, mostly the orientation leaders. The orientation directors at PU and SU who were alums cited their own undergraduate experiences as influential in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts during orientation leader trainings and orientation sessions. In turn, based on the interviews and observations, the orientation leaders at these schools genuinely seemed to like their directors and have close relationships. These relationships may be fostered by sharing a common connection with the institutions’ cultural artifacts between the orientation directors and orientation leaders despite the generation gaps. This was an unanticipated finding that may have implications for practice such as the ability of cultural artifacts to convey multiple meanings that transcend time as well as the notion that professionals who are familiar with their institution’s artifacts may be able to connect more effectively to their students than individuals who do not know their significance or are aware that they exist.

Though this study hints at the importance of first-year students learning the meanings of cultural artifacts, and the role of orientation units in this process, it is first essential that the orientation directors are familiar with these elements at their institutions. Although the directors at SU and PU were alums and had knowledge of the prominent artifacts at their institutions, it is important for other orientation directors to learn the significance of cultural artifacts at their schools so they can work more effectively with students. One way to learn about artifacts may be through scripted campus tours (Magolda, 2000; 2001) or meeting with an institutional historian; this suggestion would be valuable to the
orientation director at TU who thought there were a lack of cultural artifacts at her institution despite being an alumnus. Learning the meanings of the same cultural artifacts can give student leaders and directors a common bonding point, as it did apparently at SU and PU.

Implications for Policy

New student orientation offices may be a small administrative unit, but orientation directors and orientation leaders are responsible for serving thousands of incoming students at orientation sessions. Since, orientation programs are one of the most visible units of an institution, orientation directors and orientation leaders must be aware of their policies in relation to cultural artifacts. Orientation directors could revisit the missions of their units and find a way to incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts in their orientation activities, including leader trainings and orientation sessions. The directors could devote content as part of the trainings and orientation sessions to feature prominent cultural artifacts at their institutions to ensure that both orientation leaders and first-year students are purposely learning the meanings of these things. The orientation leader training syllabuses collected at DU, SU, and PU, included sessions that made reference to cultural artifacts. Incorporating the meanings of cultural artifacts into the trainings would be beneficial in making sure that all of the orientation leaders and the orientation directors have clear roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts and that this happens intentionally. Establishing policies that make reference to the importance of cultural artifacts will help ensure that their meanings are passed on to first-year students by orientation leaders.
Another potential policy issue facing orientation units involves the messages sent by cultural artifacts to first-year students. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, artifacts can express negative messages to members of the campus community and in turn, may become featured in lawsuits such as the Texas A&M bonfire and University of Illinois mascot. Although orientation directors may not have control over the messages sent by cultural artifacts, or how students interpret them, the directors could address such issues in their orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions. While this may appear to be an implication for practice, the researcher is suggesting that the orientation directors view the messages of cultural artifacts as a policy issue because of the potential harm and controversy caused by artifacts with negative messages.

Though most of the cultural artifacts discussed by the orientation directors and orientation leaders were described as sending positive messages to new students, the orientation director at SU described a verbal artifact that sent a racially offensive message to the campus community (Banning & Bartels, 1997; Banning & Luna, 1992). As an Asian American, the director was offended by the language “Asian ghetto” used to describe a hub of restaurants close to campus. While she was offended, the student orientation leaders as a whole, including two Asian Americans, viewed the term as nothing more than slang for a hang out spot. From a policy standpoint, this finding was puzzling since the orientation leaders had a guiding concept (aka policy) referred to as HOSERS: Honesty, Objectivity, Sensitivity, Empathy, Referrals, and Support. Throughout the focus group interview and observation of the training session by the researcher, the importance of this concept was evident including the emphasis on sensitivity. Despite an exercise devoted to using inclusive language when referring to off-
campus neighborhoods while leading orientation tours, the orientation leaders interviewed did not consider the words “Asian ghetto” to be offensive while the orientation director did. Although a policy, HOSERS, was in place to promote sensitivity, the student leaders did not seem to view this as relevant policy issue.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, additional research seems warranted. First, it would be helpful to contrast these findings at four private universities. Do orientation units at private institutions incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts into their orientation leader trainings and new student orientation sessions more than orientation units at public institutions? One of the participants in the pilot interviews who had several years experience working in orientation programs at both public and private schools suggested that there were differences in some of the types of cultural artifacts. The former orientation director explained that private religious universities may have more sacred artifacts that express different messages to students than artifacts at public universities. He also suggested that there were differences based on whether the orientation programs were located in student affairs or academic affairs divisions and indicated that student affairs based orientation programs would be more likely to emphasize the meanings of cultural artifacts.

Second, two of the orientation directors who were alums of their institutions pointed to their status and past experiences as undergraduates as influential in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students. While three of the directors were alums, only two of them felt this way, but they all appeared to have close relationships with their student orientation leaders. Future research exploring these relationships could
determine if student orientation leaders who work for orientation directors who are alums of the same institutions have closer relationships and are, therefore, more connected to the orientation programs.

Third, the orientation directors’ active involvement in NODA and how the association has helped them in their professional development suggests another issue. If orientation directors rely on their training from NODA, and two of the participants in this study did not perceive themselves to have roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, future research could investigate the professional development of orientation directors.

Fourth, future research could be conducted on exploring the roles of other campus individuals and administrative units in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts. Personnel administrators from residential life, academic advising, and the faculty were mentioned by the participants as having roles in this process at the four universities studied. It would be helpful to interview individuals from these units to understand their roles. Alumni affairs offices, although not mentioned by the participants, could also be explored since personnel from these units are responsible for cultivating relationships with students as they exit the institution. While this study shed light on the roles of an administrative unit and personnel who work with students as they enter institutions in relation to cultural artifacts, exploring the perceptions of alumni affairs personnel of their roles could provide insight as to what is communicated to students when they leave.

Fifth, if students learn about the meanings of cultural artifacts through attending new student orientation, how do faculty and other campus personnel learn about the meanings of cultural artifacts? Is there an administrative unit that has a role in communicating the
meanings of cultural artifacts to these individuals? While the orientation directors who were alums were familiar with many of the same cultural artifacts despite the generation gap with their students, what about higher education personnel who are not alums? How are they introduced to and learn the meanings of cultural artifacts at their institutions?

Along with these issues, further research seems needed about the cultural artifacts identified in this study. While physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts (Kuh & Hall, 1993) were all appropriate categories in discussing these issues with the participants, affective artifacts were a fourth category that seemed warranted for some of the artifacts focused on in this study such as rivalries and athletics. Based on this finding, and since little of the higher education literature on cultural artifacts has discussed rivalries and athletics in detail (Thelin, 1994; Toma, 2003), additional research seems needed in these areas and how they may serve as affective, behavioral, verbal, or even physical cultural artifacts.

Conclusion

Though most of the participants acknowledged having indirect roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts, this study argues that an institution's history, influential individuals, campus traditions, symbols, and other artifacts should be communicated intentionally to first-year students. Previous research indicates that the greater a student's academic and social integration, the more connected he or she will be to the institution (Tinto, 1993) Orientation is one means of effectively assisting in this integration and helping students persist (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthering these points, this study argues that orientation directors and orientation leaders should include
cultural artifacts, communicate their meanings, and discuss their importance with incoming students as part of new student orientation. These efforts would help first-year students in transitioning to a new environment as well as promoting students success.

While the findings in this study cannot be generalized, it is important for orientation professionals to be aware of the implications for practice and policy. New student orientation is an opportunity for the meanings of cultural artifacts to be communicated intentionally to first-year students. It is the responsibility of the orientation directors to incorporate the meanings of cultural artifacts into their orientation leader trainings to make sure students are passing on these things to first-year students attending orientation. If orientation directors are unfamiliar with the cultural artifacts at their institution, the researcher recommends taking a campus tour and meeting with an institutional historian as a starting point to learn more about the significance of the school’s artifacts.

Based on this research, while physical, verbal, and behavioral are still relevant categories for discussing cultural artifacts, affective artifacts are a fourth category that deserves attention because of the importance of rivalries, athletics, and other symbols at institutions. Developing a model for explicitly labeling cultural artifacts will help practitioners and others in identifying artifacts at colleges and universities. Further research can explore other higher education personnel and their potential roles in communicating the meanings of cultural artifacts to first-year students, as well as how they learn the significance of cultural artifacts at their campuses.

Participating in campus traditions, appreciating the significance of historic buildings, reciting the words of a fight song, and wearing school colors are all ways in which cultural artifacts are influential in learning the culture of one’s institution. Colleges and
universities that have struggled to develop meaningful traditions to foster a sense of belonging must first look to cultural artifacts. Undoubtedly, there will be something unique to each campus, whether it is a physical, verbal, behavioral, or affective cultural artifact that communicates what it means to be affiliated with that institution.
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