

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DIVISION OF HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIPS AS A PROMINENT ROLE IN CRISIS  
COMMUNICATION: A PENN STATE UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

ASHTON MICHELLE TUPPER

Spring 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in Communication Arts and Sciences  
with honors in Communication Arts and Sciences

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Cheryl L. Nicholas  
Assistant Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Thesis Supervisor

Sandy Feinstein  
Associate Professor of English  
Honors Adviser

\*Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, ideas associated with the Situated Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) are used with an interactional lens to study the efficacy of the crisis communication employed by Penn State University during the Sandusky football scandal.

Specifically, using the SCCT loosely as a guide, while recognizing the limitations of the SCCT, the paper provides an analysis and discussion of how Penn State main campus' crisis management strategies affected the student body and, more specifically, branch campuses. The reaction of students from Penn State Berks reveals the function of communication as a dialogic and the ways in which the attribution of organizational responsibility is formed through the contextual basis of relationships. Relationships are dynamic, communication is dynamic, and publics are dynamic. Organizations must learn to exist in the dialogic space if they are to be successful in repairing their reputation in the aftermath of a crisis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Crises Explained.....	2
Public Relations and Crisis Communication.....	4
Crisis Communication Theories.....	6
Image Repair Theory.....	6
Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).....	8
Critiques of the SCCT.....	15
Methodological Considerations.....	16
Method.....	19
Case Background.....	20
Pennsylvania State University.....	20
The Sandusky Football Scandal.....	22
Analysis.....	24
Initial Responses.....	24
Communication to the Student Body.....	34
Student Responses to the Scandal.....	40
Crisis Communication as a Dialogic.....	43
The Impact on Branch Campuses: Penn State Berks.....	44
Conclusion.....	46

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 3-1 SCCT: Crisis Types by Crisis Clusters.....	10
Table 3-2 SCCT: Crisis Response Strategies.....	13

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give credit where credit is due because I would not have become the young scholar that I am without the support of those around me. I am blessed to have chosen a major with incredible professors to guide and encourage me throughout my educational experience. I admire the skill and intellectual expertise of each professor and I am thankful for their continual commitment to foster a teachable environment both inside and outside of the classroom. I would especially like to thank Cheryl Nicholas, and Catherine Catanach, two of the professors in the Communication Arts and Sciences division, for their consistent availability and willingness to help me excel as a student as well as a young woman.

## Introduction

“We bleed blue and white.” This is a motto that I am confident many Pennsylvania state residents are familiar with, and, undeniably, a motto that many more Penn State students are familiar with, for it is the anthem that proud Penn Staters declare. The defining phrase of Penn State students and alumni makes reference to the university colors, blue and white, and infers that students internalize university values, beliefs, and traditions so strongly that the Penn State system affects them physically; they “bleed” blue and white. Unfortunately, Penn State experienced a crisis that brought tremendous pain to the university system, the student body, and adoring Penn State fans. Not only did the crisis involve a horrific crime, but it was also centered around Penn State football, including legendary Joe Paterno, which are both representative of Penn State values. After all, Penn State pride is most commonly associated with its Division 1, Big Ten, football team and its celebrated leader, Paterno.

On November 6, 2011, news broke that a grand jury investigation was taking place regarding alleged child molester Jerry Sandusky, former Penn State football defensive coordinator, and charges brought against him involving the sexual abuse of young children on Penn State property. Given the news of the alleged crimes, many people scrambled to re-position the image of their beloved Penn State football program, leaving them with daunting questions for the University. Consequently, Penn State was forced to provide answers as their only means to bring peace to all those that had placed their hope and trust in Penn State for so long. In an attempt to calm the storm and offer reassurance to their stakeholders, Penn State officials began to release statements to the press. This paper examines the crisis communication strategies employed by Penn State Main campus in the wake of the Sandusky football scandal. The paper

will focus on the effects of the scandal and the ensuing crisis management strategies on branch campuses. Specifically, using the SCCT loosely as a guide, while recognizing the limitations of the SCCT, the paper analyzes and discusses how Penn State main campus' crisis management strategies affected Penn State Berks.

### **Crises Explained**

Murphy's Law, a folk concept, which states, "if something can go wrong, it will," can best summarize organizational crisis (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p. 1). According to Coombs (2007), "A crisis will interrupt normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of an organization." It is imperative that crisis situations are not taken lightly nor approached with naivety since the threat to reputation presented by the crisis may in fact cause the demise of the company. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to have a clear understanding of how to protect their reputation in the minds of their publics; after all, an organization cannot continue to survive without the support of key publics such as consumers, employees, suppliers, etc. A reputation is the comprehensive evaluation that publics make about an organization's success in attaining their expected standards (Coombs, 2007); this is also commonly referred to as public opinion. An organization's reputation is so imperative to its nature and success that it is often considered a valuable intangible asset, so much so that it is even accounted for in the business' finances as goodwill (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Goodwill is simply an accounting term, which references the added value to the company's total worth that is a result of factors such as reputation, location, and superior products (Edmonds et al., 2010). Publics may also be referred to as stakeholders, who are any group of people that can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization (Fearn-Banks, 1996). In addition, publics can be broken down into primary and secondary groups. Primary groups, such as consumers, suppliers, employees, creditors, are those

who hold such a high stake in the organization that the organization depends upon them for survival. Secondary groups of publics also hold stakes in the organization, including interest groups, media, competitors etc.; however, the organization can continue to function without their presence.

Defined as a “major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, p.1), a crisis can easily imperil any organization, affecting not only its reputation but also its publics, products, and/or services. In addition, every crisis will follow the same cycle comprised of five stages, although some crises end at earlier stages within the crisis life cycle (Fearn-Banks, 1996). The first stage of a crisis is detection, followed by prevention and preparation, containment, recovery, and reflection. Warning signs are presented to the organization during the detection stage. Whether the signs arise from organizational crises in similar industries or from frequent and intense employee complaints, the organization should always be cognizant of its surroundings in order to make significant attempts to stop a crisis at this stage by addressing the issue and/or negative emotions. If the crisis is not detected early on it will progress into the second stage, prevention and preparation. In this case it is possible to prevent the crisis from progressing further, or at least from progressing at a high magnitude. Therefore, it is crucial that during this stage organizations develop ongoing, clear, and honest communication with their various stakeholders in order to strengthen their relationship and lessen the crisis effects. In order to have a remote chance of preventing further escalation of a crisis, organizations must not only communicate clearly, continuously, and honestly in the crux of a crisis, but they must also convey to and assure their publics that they are doing so. Similarly, an established relationship with publics may help the organization be prepared for crises. It is not always possible to detect or prevent a crisis; however, it is always possible to be prepared. Crises



communication plans are the primary tools used for such a situation. The plan essentially maps out all potential crises, potential victims, and potential publics that may be affected and includes step by step instructions on who will handle certain situations and how those situations will be handled. Crisis communication plans are so important in the event of a crisis that even the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) discusses the importance of them on their website ([www.ready.gov/business/implementation](http://www.ready.gov/business/implementation)). Containment is the third stage and marks that a crisis has spread, although it could be averted by basic crisis communication strategies that were previously discussed. During this stage, the organization makes all of its attempts to direct the crisis along a path to recovery by positively influencing public opinion regarding the organizational reputation; and this is most commonly done through various crisis communication strategies. The purpose of using specific strategies is to extract desirable positive responses from the organization's publics. Recovery and reflection are the final two stages and are probably the most crucial to an organization's success in managing a crisis. Recovery is the process of regaining the confidence and respect of key stakeholders and communicating the resolution to the crisis in order to return to normal business. Finally, a crisis can be a significant opportunity for internal growth if an organization honestly reflects on its strengths and weaknesses during the crisis and learns from them.

### **Public Relations and Crisis Communication**

As previously mentioned, it is vital for management not only to expect a crisis to occur but also to arrange a plan of action to be executed in the event of said crisis. In fact, crisis management is the process through which top management strategically prepares for the worst scenario and also prepares an ensuing response (Fearn-Banks, 1996). The premeditated response techniques are referred to as crisis communication, which will be carried out by the organization

to its publics before, during, or after the negative repercussions of the crisis. The public relations department of an organization is typically the appropriate department for handling crisis management and crisis communication. According to Grunig and Repper (1992), the public relations' head must be an important part of the organization's top management in order to generate excellent public relations and crisis communications programs. Therefore, public relations professionals must have a solid understanding as to why they operate using certain strategies and tactics prior to, in the midst of, and after a crisis; they must also have an acute awareness of the research that points to the most effective organizational strategies and tactics.

According to Fearn-Banks (1996), most of the crisis communications theories build on Grunig and Hunt's public relations excellence theory (1992). The excellence theory is based upon four potential types of public relations practices or "models" that organizations utilize. The models range from one to four, one being the least desirable of the models and four being the most desirable. **Model One** is the press agency/publicity model. "All publicity is good publicity" is the defining slogan for this type of practice. It is also characterized by one-way communication from the organization to its publics, often with no feedback. This model's public relations professional is primarily interested in making his or her organization or product known. It is also common for the public relations practitioner to incorporate little to no research in accomplishing their professional duties. For example, they may accomplish their goals through truthful or non-truthful statements so long as the result, publicity, is achieved. **Model Two**, the public information model, exemplifies a journalistic approach to reporting information. It differs from the first model in that it promotes truth in all situations. However, it also compares to the first model in terms of utilizing little to no research and one-way channels of communication. This is the most common model found in corporations. **Model Three** steadily graduates its

public relations professional into more complex arenas of practice. This model enforces two-way communication techniques and is thus named the “two-way asymmetric model.” The feedback in this model, however, rarely spurs organizational change due to internal adoption of the “we know best” attitude. Organizations that operate with a model three type of public relations program often believe that its publics should espouse their organizational viewpoints. In order to accomplish this type of influence, the PR professional will utilize a plethora of social science theories as well as research tools to obtain the maximum effects of their persuasion, ultimately resulting in a change of consumer behavior. Finally, the most complex model of a public relations practice, **Model Four**, is a two-way symmetric model. In other words, the organization engages in a dialogue with its publics in order to achieve mutual understanding. Unlike the other three models, the publics, as well as management, are subject to change as a result of the dialogue. The public relations practitioner subscribing to a model four approach will also draw upon research and social science theories. However, rather than persuasion, the purpose of such research is to understand the publics and to recognize effective ways of communicating organizational beliefs, values, and goals to them. As one can imagine, most organizations are actually a combination of the four models, but whichever model is most prevalent in their practices would be the one under which they are classified.

## **Crisis Communication Theories**

### **Image Repair Theory**

According to Kim, Avery, and Lariscy (2009), the two main theories that represent the dominant paradigms in crisis communication research are William Benoit’s (1997) Theory of Image Restoration and W. Timothy Coomb’s (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The first of the two theories that will be elaborated upon in this paper is William

Benoit's theory of image repair. The key concepts in understanding the theory lie in the accusation against the organization and/or person and the response of the organization and/or person (Benoit, 1997). The attack against the accused has two parts. The first part requires that the accused is held responsible for an action and the second part requires that the action is considered offensive to a salient audience. Once the attack is made, the accused must choose a message strategy to respond to the attack. Benoit's model of image repair suggests five broad restoration strategies, some of which are divided into strategies that are more specific.

The five broad strategies are: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Denial can be found in the form of simple denial, which includes denying that the act even occurred, denying that the act was committed, or denying that it was harmful. Another form of denial is merely shifting the blame onto someone else. The second broad strategy is evading responsibility. This strategy is also divided into smaller, more specific categories including: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intention. These tactics allow the defenders to claim that their actions were only in response to another's; that they lacked sufficient knowledge of the situation elements, that their actions were entirely accidental, and, lastly, that their actions were intended for good, not harm. The third broad category is reducing offensiveness, which is comprised of six sub-categories: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking, and compensation. Bolstering can be used to encourage the audience's positive attitudes about the accused person, which will hopefully offset the negative feelings they hold about the action. On the other hand, the accuser may only try to minimize the negative feelings the audience has about the act, which is the minimization strategy. Differentiation is another technique, which compares the act to a similar but more offensive act in order to downplay it. The transcendence strategy will attempt to put the

act in a more favorable light in hopes that a positive context will lessen the offensiveness of the act. Attacking the accuser operates on the basis of attacks against the accuser in order to destroy the credibility of the accusation. The final technique that a defendant may use to reduce offensiveness is a compensation method. This kind of method seeks to reimburse the victim of the act to diminish negative feelings. The final two broad strategies are corrective action and mortification. Corrective action usually happens in conjunction with an apology; however, it can take place without one. The accused person seeks to repair the problem and ensure that it will not happen again. Mortification is the option to beg for the audience's forgiveness. Individuals facing the accusation will usually admit guilt and express extreme regret.

Although these strategies have been proven effective, there are also specific times and places to use each of them in order to maximize their effectiveness. For example, a corporation often has multiple audiences with multiple goals, values, interests, and concerns. Therefore, it is imperative to determine the nature of the crisis and identify the most important publics. Furthermore, Benoit's theory closely aligns with a model two approach to public relations discourse. Most of the theory is concerned with how to form the message to persuade the audience, which is primarily a form of one-way communication. The audience tends to take an effective role rather than an affective role in William Benoit's theory of image repair.

### **Situational Crisis Communication Theory**

Most of the research completed within the realm of crisis communication is centered on case studies, which exclude crucial information regarding stakeholder's reactions to specific crisis response strategies (Ahulwalia et al., 2000; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Dean, 2004). There is an extreme need for systematic and quantifiable decision making during a crisis (Rousseau, 2006), hence the development of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Kim, Avery, &

Lariscy, 2009). Coomb's theory, henceforth abbreviated as SCCT, provides measurable "evidence-based framework for understanding how to maximize the reputational protection afforded by post-crisis communication" since it is grounded in quantitative research (Coombs, 2007). The SCCT highlights significant aspects of a crisis, which influence the stakeholders' internalization of an organization's reputation and their attributions toward the crisis. SCCT specifically suggests that there are three aspects that influence the reputational threat: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation. All of these factors draw upon the theoretical framework of the Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985), which states that people make assumptions (attributions) regarding the causes of certain situations, especially those that have the greatest impact (Coombs, 2007). In order to effectively evaluate the reputational threat opposing an organization, a crisis manager must be able to understand the stakeholders' assessments of the event (Coombs, 2007). After all, Attribution Theory suggests that stakeholder attributions will affect the behavioral response of an organization depending on whether or not the crisis is determined to be a result of situational elements or organizational fault. The stakeholders' initial assessment of responsibility, known as initial crisis responsibility, determines the level of reputational threat. The initial assessment of responsibility relies on the type of crisis. In order to clearly understand the crisis types and their ensuing attributions the SCCT arranges such information into three crisis clusters (Table 1) (Coombs, 2007).

Table 1

<b>SCCT: Crisis Types by Crisis Clusters</b>	
<b>Victim Cluster</b>	<p>In these crisis types, the organization is also a victim of the crisis. <i>Weak attributions of crisis responsibility=mild reputational threat</i></p> <p><b>Natural Disaster:</b> Acts of nature damage an organization such as an earthquake</p> <p><b>Rumor:</b> False and damaging information about an organization is being circulated</p> <p><b>Workplace Violence:</b> Current or former employee attacks current employees onsite</p> <p><b>Product Tampering / Malevolence:</b> External agent causes damage to an organization</p>
<b>Accidental Cluster</b>	<p>In these crisis types, the organization actions leading to the crisis were unintentional. <i>Minimal attributions of crisis responsibility=moderate reputational threat</i></p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner.</p> <p><b>Technical-Error Accidents:</b> A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident</p> <p><b>Technical-Error Product Harm:</b> A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident</p>
<b>Preventable Cluster</b>	<p>In these crisis types, the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions or violated a law/regulation. <i>Strong attributions of crisis responsibility=severe reputational threat</i></p> <p><b>Human-Error Accidents:</b> Human error causes an industrial accident</p> <p><b>Human-Error Product Harm:</b> Human error causes a product to be recalled</p> <p><b>Organizational Misdeed with No Injuries:</b> Stakeholders are deceived without injury</p> <p><b>Organizational Misdeed Management Misconduct:</b> Laws or regulations are violated by management</p> <p><b>Organizational Misdeeds with Injuries:</b> Stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur</p>

The first cluster is the victim cluster in which the organization is viewed as a victim and, consequently, attributions of organizational responsibility are weak and the reputational threat is mild. Natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and product tampering or malevolence are

all examples of victim crises. Crisis types that produce low attribution levels of organizational responsibility are categorized in the accidental cluster. These types of crises infer that the organization's actions that led to the crisis were accidental, such as those resulting from technical-error accidents, product recall, or advocate groups that claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner, and thus the organization only faces a moderate reputational threat. Finally, the preventable cluster includes crisis events that are strongly attributed to organizational responsibility. Events of this nature involve situations in which the organization consciously violated a law or regulation, took inappropriate action, or placed people at risk; and, hence, the organization faces severe reputational threat. As the crisis clusters illustrate, reputational threats increase as attributions toward organizational responsibility increase (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Apart from initial crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior relational reputation are the two remaining factors that have a direct effect on the organization's reputational threat. These factors can be described as intensifying factors because they exaggerate the presumed responsibility for the crisis. Crisis history is the organization's past experience with similar crises and if the history reveals a repetitive cycle, publics will be more likely to attribute responsibility to the organization. Similarly, if the organization shows a past history of treating its stakeholders poorly the organization's crisis responsibility will still be amplified. Alternatively, a positive crisis history and prior relational reputation may alleviate some of the organizational responsibility in the midst of a crisis. In any case, Coombs developed a list of crisis response strategies to reduce negative behavioral responses the organization may face, which will hopefully repair the threatened image. Unlike William Benoit's theory of image repair, however, SCCT requires a theoretical link between crises and their response strategies. The



aforementioned concept of responsibility, from the Attribution Theory, bridges this conceptual gap. A crisis manager will be able to evaluate the severity of the reputational threat depending on the crisis type, crisis history, and prior relational reputation. Once these factors are identified, managers will be equipped to skillfully select an appropriate response strategy to frame the crisis in a way that alters the public's perception of the organization (Nerb & Spada, 1997).

Unfortunately, managers are constantly competing with and must be constantly aware of the media, notorious for framing its stories, because more often than not, stakeholders will experience and adopt the viewpoints presented by the media (Coombs, 2007). Thus, most crisis managers seek to reinforce or re-establish a particular frame through their crisis response strategies.

The crisis response strategies have three objectives in relation to organizational reputation: to shape the attributions of the crisis, change the perceptions of the organization in the context of the crisis, and to reduce the negative effects that the organization may incur (Coombs, 1995). Furthermore, the strategies are divided into primary and secondary categories (Table 2) (Coombs, 2007).

Table 2

<b>SCCT: PRIMARY Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<b>Deny Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<i>Attack the Accuser</i>	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
<i>Denial:</i>	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
<i>Scapegoat:</i>	Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
<b>Diminish Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<i>Excuse:</i>	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
<i>Justification:</i>	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
<b>Rebuild Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<i>Compensation:</i>	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
<i>Apology</i>	Crisis manager indicates the organization take full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
<b>SCCT: SECONDARY Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<b>Bolstering Crisis Response Strategies</b>	
<i>Reminder:</i>	Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization
<i>Ingratiation:</i>	Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.
<i>Victimage:</i>	Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.

The primary strategies correlate with the crisis clusters and, hence, are distinguished in three broad groups. The first group of the primary strategies is referred to as the deny crisis response strategies, useful for crises that are included in the victim cluster. These include the categories of attack the accuser, denial, and scapegoat. The crisis manager implements attacks against the accuser to confront the person or group making damaging claims about the organization. Through denial, the organization asserts that there is no crisis and shifts the blame to a force external to the organization by using a scapegoat. The second group of primary strategies is the diminish crisis response strategies. Excuse and justification are the two strategies

under this grouping, which are best used in response to accidental crisis types. A crisis manager will minimize the company's intentions of harm or its inability to control the events that led to the crisis when he/she employs an excuse strategy. A justification strategy will minimize the effects of or damage caused by the crisis. Lastly, in a situation where a manager is facing a preventable crisis type, Coombs recommends he or she utilize a strategy such as compensation or apology, which are both strategies in the third group of primary crisis response strategies. Compensation focuses on the victims and attempts to offer some sort of condolence through money or gifts. Apology accepts full responsibility on behalf of the organization and asks stakeholders and victims for forgiveness.

Secondary response strategies may also be employed to handle a crisis, and these are categorized as bolstering strategies, which include the categories of reminder, ingratiation, and victimage. Respectively, a crisis manager has the option to remind stakeholders of the organization's history of reputable action, praise the stockholders, or remind the stakeholders that the organization is also a victim of the crisis.

Although the SCCT provides crisis managers with excellent guidance on maintaining reputational assets, the suggested approaches should not be taken until crisis managers have met their original responsibilities. Ethically, the physical and psychological needs of the stakeholders should be the first priorities of management during or after a crisis. SCCT, or any reputational repair strategy for that matter, should not be executed until the initial needs of the stakeholders have been met. An organization is expected to provide information (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), so it must move past the dissemination of information and take responsibility and express sympathy with their victims to be regarded as honorable and sympathetic (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

## Critiques of the SCCT

Although the Situated Crisis Communication Theory has covered substantial theoretical ground in the eyes of many crisis communication scholars by graduating to a more “quantitative” perspective of handling crises, it simultaneously fails to address the open, continuous, shifting nature of our social reality. It is interesting how the two-way symmetrical model (model four) of Grunig and Hunt’s public relations excellence theory (1992) is referred to as the most desirable public relations approach among the various existing methods of public relations practice that the theory suggests. The two-way symmetrical approach acknowledges the individual existence of an organization and its various publics and values the communicative space between them, which ultimately praises a dialogical tactic. Thus, crisis communication in this light would hypothetically manifest as an interaction between the two parties in which each party would portray their views and, thus, re-solidify their relationship through their expression of differences. If the two-way symmetrical model has been noted to be the best of the public relations models, then why do many scholars seem to favor theories that seem to restrict crisis communication as a methodical approach rather than as an interaction existing in its specific time and space? Crisis communication theories such as the Situated Crisis Communication Theory provide valuable insight into the internalization of values, attitudes, and beliefs and the ways in which they coincide with the perception of crisis responsibility. The crisis clusters that SCCT arranges, however, definitively speak to appropriate courses of crisis response strategies solely based upon various attributions in order to extract the optimum reputational protection in each situation. The problem with proposing such “resolutions” is that the relational tension, or the crisis, will differ with each public, therefore one response strategy will not work for all publics because it cannot be assumed that all publics attribute the same organizational responsibility

given a specific type of crisis. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all publics will have a positive reaction to the same crisis response strategy. The failure to differentiate between key publics, internal or external to the organization, is a flaw in the SCCT. In cases where the crisis type is the determinant of an overarching method of communication, it negates the nature of dialogue because it assumes the relational contradiction resides within the individual, so communication becomes a desperate solution rather than an open space where two parties unite based upon present negotiations. Understanding crises as an “interaction” is an important facet of the research presented here. In this paper, ideas associated with the SCCT are used with an interactional lens to study the efficacy of the crisis communication employed by Penn State University during the Sandusky football scandal.

### **Methodological Considerations**

In order to incorporate an interactional perspective to the study, components of Coombs SCCT will be treated as a genre of communication (in the style of apologia). Foss explains generic criticism as a form of rhetorical criticism that stems from the belief that specific situations provoke specific needs and expectations among the audience members and, therefore, require certain types of rhetorical responses (Foss, 1989). This perspective emphasizes the dialogic between speakers and audience(s). Rather than examining the effects of one situation on one act of communication, generic criticism is interested in examining the similarities of rhetorical responses occurring in comparable circumstances. The process of categorization is central to generic criticism, as artifacts are grouped according to their commonalities that distinguish them from other groups of artifacts.

Three elements comprise a rhetorical genre or category: situational requirements, substantive and stylistic elements, and organizational principles. Situational requirements are the particular conditions or perception of conditions in a situation that necessitate specific types of rhetorical responses. Substantive and stylistic elements refer to the features of the rhetoric that the rhetor chooses to respond to a specific situation. Substantive aspects signify the content of the rhetoric (what is being communicated), and stylistic aspects signify the form of the rhetoric (how it is being communicated). Finally, organizational principle is an encompassing term or notion that reflects the dynamic relationship formed through the situational requirements and substantive and stylistic elements in ways that constitute a genre.

The analyses in this paper loosely follow the generic application method of generic criticism (Foss, 1989). Generic application evaluates rhetoric as successful or unsuccessful based upon the features of a particular genre. The application follows four steps:

- 1) Describe the situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principles of a genre;
- 2) Identify the situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principles of a rhetorical artifact that is representative of the particular genre;
- 3) Compare the characteristics of the artifact and the genre; and,
- 4) Evaluate the artifact based on its ability to meet the generic requirements.

Foss explains that people have expectations of style and content within a generic form of rhetoric and if a particular instance of rhetoric does not adhere to the generic requirements, it may cause the audience to respond in ways that are undesirable to the rhetor. Alternatively, a critic may find

that generic violation increases the artifacts' effectiveness. Thus, the success of a rhetorical artifact is measured by the extent of positive impact on the audience resulting from the accordance with or violation of the requirements to the genre in which it belongs.

Categories from Coombs' (2007) Situated Crisis Communication Theory standards of excellent and effective crisis communication are used with Foss' (1989) generic criticism to study crisis communication responses of Pennsylvania State University regarding the Jerry Sandusky Scandal. The categories of crisis type from Coombs' model are used as "genres" for particular types of crisis. The SCCT pairs each crisis type with the level of organizational threat and also pairs it with suggested strategies to repair the organizational reputation most effectively. Therefore, based upon the crisis type of the Penn State scandal, the crisis communication that followed the scandal will be compared to the tenets of its particular "genre" according to the SCCT.

Penn State University has many publics which include but are not limited to: donors, fans, alumni, the community, other universities (competitors), the President, the Board of Trustees, professors, staff, and parents. Nonetheless, this paper will focus on one group of publics in particular, the student body, with emphasis on the students at the branch campus, Penn State Berks. Penn State is an educational institution, and it cannot operate without the tuition and fees of its students who attend the University. This makes the student body a group of primary publics, as they are key to Penn State's survival and existence. There is often a lot of discussion about Penn State in the public sphere, and any time that Penn State's name is spoken most people associate it with the main campus, Penn State University Park. There is no need to say Penn State University Park because when one says "Penn State," it is automatically understood that he or she is referring to the main campus. However, branch campuses are always marked by their

campus location. For instance, a student at Penn State Berks campus will most likely speak of his or her experience at Penn State Berks, not his or her experience at Penn State. As a result, the branch campuses tend to fall into the shadows of the main campus although they share the same name. The culture at Penn State University Park is so dominant that students from all of the campuses identify with traditions and events at University Park in order to feel united with the Penn State name. Therefore, these organizational ‘branches’ are a good place to study crisis communication as they provide a unique perspective on how organizations manage their relationship with their publics.

### **Method**

For the purpose of this study, I analyzed public communication by the administrative leaders of Penn State presented in public forums and media outlets. I began tracking the communication of Penn State immediately after the crisis occurred on November 5 through news stations and newspapers and also via Penn State Live, Penn State’s official online university news source. The communication tactics immediately intrigued me, seeing as I have taken public relations classes, which discussed crisis communication. I also began to log the communication from administrators at main campus that was sent to the entire student body of Penn State. As soon as Penn State released its Openness website on February 13, I was able to retrieve the key pieces of communication that I wanted to analyze. Penn State’s new openness website was designed as a way to uphold the university’s commitment to open and clear communication with the public. It is a source for community members and stakeholders to stay informed of university events and fundraisers. It is also a source for information on the current Sandusky scandal. I chose to focus on the initial response and the messages that were communicated to the student body shortly thereafter the initial crisis went public. As I explained earlier in the paper, there are



several stages that a crisis may go through, and I focus on the containment (initial responses) and recovery phases (follow-up communication to the student body), given the magnitude of the scandal in the media. I apply the “genres” from Coombs’ model that lent themselves to specific messages I analyze. I focus on the words and phrases that were used, who spoke or wrote them and who they were being spoken or written to, in order to evaluate whether or not the particular piece of rhetoric adhered to its genre as described by Coombs’ SCCT model (2007). The following research questions drove my study:

RQ1: What were the crisis communication strategies used by Penn State during the containment and recovery phase? Were they efficacious?

RQ2: How did the student body (on main campus and at Penn State Berks) respond to the crisis communication strategies?

## **Case Background**

### **Pennsylvania State University**

In 1855, the Commonwealth chartered Penn State University at the request of the Pennsylvania State Agricultural Society (A Brief Penn State History, 2006). The original intent was that the university would educate students on the application of scientific principles to farming. Center County, PA was the location of the university, which later expanded into numerous other campuses throughout Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania State University is now composed of 24 campuses: University Park is the main campus and there are 23 branch campuses. Pennsylvania State University has grown from its humble beginnings as a primarily agriculture-focused school and now ranks highly throughout the country in a broad range of

categories, including: 44<sup>th</sup> nationally in business for the Smeal College of Business, 25<sup>th</sup> nationally in engineering for the College of Engineering, 76<sup>th</sup> nationally for the Dickinson School of Law, and 26<sup>th</sup> nationally for the College of Education (Where We Stand). Since Penn State has been growing rapidly its libraries have also been ranked in the top ten North American research libraries, according to the Association of Research Library's most recent rankings for 2009-10. Penn State is also the home to the largest student-run philanthropy organization, THON. As of 2011, the annual Dance-a-THON raised \$9,563,016.09 for children with cancer and their families. It is also worth noting that in addition to the heavy emphasis that Penn State main campus places on research the students are not neglected; it also ranks as the top producer of Fulbright recipients among research institutions, and all institutions, in the nation. Of course, Penn State would not be Penn State without mention of its long-standing record as home to one of the best Division 1 college football teams and one of the most famous Hall-of-Fame coaches, Joe Paterno (Paterno's impact spanned generations, 2012). Joe Paterno was Penn State's head football coach for 45 years and led the team to 409 wins during his career, which is the most in Division 1 football history. According to the Penn State Live news source, "He brought Penn State five undefeated seasons, three Big Ten championships and two national championships. His teams finished 23 seasons in the top 10 and 35 in the top 25." It is evident that Penn State football and Penn State are synonymous with football legend JoePa.

As mentioned, Penn State now includes 23 branch campuses outside of the University Park campus throughout Pennsylvania, one of which is the Penn State Berks campus. The Berks campus was originally the WPI (Wyomissing Polytechnic Institute) until it was integrated as a part of the Penn State system in 1958 (Our History). Penn State Berks recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Enrollment and campus growth have been increasing at a steady rate over the years

in large part to the addition of student housing in 1990. Penn State Berks currently enrolls 2,824 students and offers fifteen baccalaureate degrees, eight associate degrees, and a wide variety of Continuing Education programs. Penn State Berks is mainly a commuter campus; however, there are several features which make the campus appealing to Pennsylvania residents, out-of-state residents, and international students. The average class size is 25, and the student to faculty ratio is 17.6 to 1 (Quick Facts). The small class and campus size allows for a more personal, intimate educational experience and has, ultimately, led to the success of the campus.

### **Sandusky Football Scandal**

On November 5, 2011, the Penn State student body was rocked as troubling news made its way to students, faculty, and staff across main campus as well as across all of the branch campuses. On the same day, the Grand Jury investigation of a case charging former Defensive Coordinator of the Penn State football team, Jerry Sandusky, with child sex charges and two other Penn State University officials, Gary Schultz and Tim Curley, with perjury and failure to report suspected child abuse, became public (Child Sex Charges, 2011). The Grand Jury case that was investigating Jerry Sandusky's involvement with young boys began in 2009 when Sandusky was banned from a high school in Clinton County. The Pennsylvania State Police and the Attorney General's Office initiated an extensive investigation. The Attorney General's Office noted that "one of the most compelling and disturbing pieces of testimony" of the investigation was that of eyewitness, graduate assistant, Mike McQueary, who reiterates his witness of a late-night sexual assault that took place in the locker room of the Lasch Football Building on the Penn State University Park campus. The horrified graduate assistant testified that he immediately called his father to report the act he had just witnessed. McQueary's father

instructed that the two report the incident to former head football coach and Penn State legend, Joe Paterno.

McQueary and his father contacted Joe Paterno the next morning, and traveled to his home to recount what McQueary witnessed the previous evening (Child Sex Charges, 2011). Paterno testified to relaying the information from the graduate assistant to Penn State's Athletic Director, Tim Curley, the following day. About a week and a half later, McQueary was then summoned to a meeting with Tim Curley and Gary Schultz, Senior Vice President for Finance and Business at the University at the time, which included oversight of the Penn State University Police Department. McQueary, once more, reiterated the abuse that he had witnessed involving Sandusky and a young boy in the showers. Unfortunately, according to the Attorney General's Office, no report was made to any law enforcement or protective child agency, despite an eyewitness account. There was also no indication of university officials' attempt to learn the identity of the sexually abused child or follow-up efforts for more information from McQueary. Rather, Curley and Schultz decided that Sandusky could not bring children from the Second Mile, the charitable organization he had founded to benefit underprivileged youth, to the football building since the victim obtained contact with Sandusky through said organization. Former Pennsylvania State University president, Graham Spanier, also reviewed and approved the decision (Penn State Abuse, 2012, and the Official Grand Jury report, 2011, for information on other victims). However, Sandusky still had unlimited access to all football facilities, including the locker room, recreational facilities, and all other university privileges (Child Sex Charges, 2011).

In addition to the 2002 eyewitness account involving graduate assistant McQueary, Schultz testified before the grand jury that he was aware of a 1998 incident (see the official

Grand Jury Report for more information) of inappropriate sexual behavior that provoked University Police investigation of Sandusky prior to the 2002 report (Child Sex Charges, 2011). Even so, he admittedly failed to pursue the matter further. The grand jury eventually identified eight victims who were targets of Sandusky's sexual assaults beginning in 1994. All of the victims were associated with Second Mile. Two days after the Grand Jury investigation was made public, Tim Curley and Gary Schultz left their university posts (Penn State Abuse, 2012). On November 9, five days after the investigation went public, Joe Paterno, more commonly referred to by adoring students and fans as "JoePa," announced his intent to retire at the end of the 2011 football season. In a statement made to the press, Paterno states, "This is a tragedy. It is one of the great sorrows of my life. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more" (Joe Paterno's Full Statement, 2011). However, hours after Paterno's announcement, the Penn State Board of Trustees fired Joe Paterno and university president, Graham Spanier. Subsequently, the Board named executive Vice President, Rodney Erickson, as Penn State's provisional President, and assistant coach Tom Bradley as the provisional head football coach. Penn State placed Mike McQueary, then assistant coach, on administrative leave two days following the replacement of Paterno and Spanier. The university also recommended that McQueary not attend the final home game due to significant threats being made against him. Finally, on December 7, Sandusky was arrested and charged with abusing two more boys.

## **Analysis**

### **Initial Responses**

According to the Situated Crisis Communication Theory, the psychological and physical needs of the publics should be the first priorities for an organization after a crisis (Coombs,

2007). Coombs says, “The first priority in any crisis is to protect stakeholders from harm, not to protect the reputation” (p.165). An organization is routinely expected to provide information (Coombs & Holladay, 2008); so in order to display integrity and gain respect, the communication must move beyond the routine dissemination of information and focus on sympathetic and apologetic messages (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). According to various experts, there are three ways to meet the psychological needs of publics in a time of uncertainty or crisis. First, a crisis creates a need for information in order to stabilize the publics’ fears and provide them with a way to cope (Sturges, 1994). Second, publics also desire to know what corrective action is going to be taken to fix the problem (Sellnow et al., 1998). Third, it is important to provide an apologetic expression of concern for the victims, and it should be noted that apologies are *not* admissions of guilt (Patel and Reinsch, 2003). However, after the initial crisis response, the SCCT suggests that one utilize specific crisis response strategies based upon the nature of the crisis. These strategies are meant to minimize or reduce the negative behavioral responses that publics may exhibit after a crisis has occurred. In the case of a preventable crisis, which is one that was foreseeable, such as a conscious violation of a law or regulation, failure to take appropriate action, or the jeopardizing of peoples’ well being, the organization is held highly responsible in the eyes of the public (Coombs, 2007). As Coombs’ theory (2007) explains, such events should be met with compensation or apology strategies. Compensation strategies employ techniques such as the offering of condolences through money or gifts. Apologetic strategies accept full organizational responsibility and request forgiveness from various publics and victims. Given the brief overview of the Sandusky scandal, Penn State was facing a preventable crisis in which there was failure to take appropriate action, and, therefore, the public deemed the university highly responsible. Once again, according to the SCCT, no matter the recommended

crisis response strategies, the initial crisis response should be sympathetic and apologetic. The first portion of my analyses focuses on the initial crisis responses issued from various key figures at Penn State in order to evaluate their effectiveness on a sympathetic and apologetic scale.

After the scandal, the first response from Penn State was released to the media via the Penn State news source (live.psu.edu) on the same day, November 5. It came from University President, Graham Spanier, stating,

The allegations about a former coach are troubling, and it is appropriate that they be investigated thoroughly. Protecting children requires the utmost vigilance. With regard to the other presentments, I wish to say that Tim Curley and Gary Schultz have my unconditional support. I have known and worked daily with Tim and Gary for more than 16 years. I have complete confidence in how they have handled the allegations about a former University employee. Tim Curley and Gary Schultz operate at the highest levels of honesty, integrity and compassion. I am confident the record will show that these charges are groundless and that they conducted themselves professionally and appropriately. (Statement from President Spanier, 2011)

Although President Spanier briefly expressed his dismay of the *situation* (in the first two lines), his sympathy seemed superficial as he followed with the declaration of “confidence” in his “friends,” Tim Curley and Gary Schultz, and testified of his faith in their appropriate action, thus downplaying the role of the victims or their plight. In doing so, he failed to take responsibility on behalf of the University and apologize for their actions. According to the SCCT model (as the President of the University), he should have 1) addressed the victims and their families and apologized that such a tragedy has happened on the Penn State premises, and 2) assured the

public and the student body that Penn State will do everything in its power to seek truth and justice. His message failed to meet the initial psychological needs of Penn State's publics and hence, invited more negative responses from them. Rather, his message more closely aligned with excuse strategies, described as minimizing the organization's intentions of harm or inability to control the events that led to the crisis, useful for accidental crises and/or crises, which have minimal organizational responsibility in the public eye (Coombs, 2007).

Four days after his initial response, however, the Board of Trustees fired him as president, and Spanier issued another statement via Penn State Live. Although a little too late, Spanier was able to offer some sympathy to the victims and their families and communicate his revulsion at Sandusky's actions retrospectively. He offered sympathy with utterances such as

I was stunned and outraged to learn that any predatory act might have occurred in a University facility or by someone associated with the University. I am heartbroken to think that any child may have been hurt and have deep convictions about the need to protect children and youth. My heartfelt sympathies go out to all those who may have been victimized. I would never hesitate to report a crime if I had any suspicion that one had been committed. (Statement by Graham Spanier, 2011).

The next public statement was that of legendary football coach, JoePa. He issued his statement to the media on November 6, the day after the scandal was made public, and it was as follows:

If true, the nature and amount of charges made are very shocking to me and all Penn Staters. While I did what I was supposed to with the one



charge brought to my attention, like anyone else involved I can't help but be deeply saddened these matters are alleged to have occurred.

Sue and I have devoted our lives to helping young people reach their potential. The fact that someone we thought we knew might have harmed young people to this extent is deeply troubling. If this is true we were all fooled, along with scores of professionals trained in such things, and we grieve for the victims and their families. They are in our prayers. As my grand jury testimony stated, I was informed in 2002 by an assistant coach that he had witnessed an incident in the shower of our locker room facility. It was obvious that the witness was distraught over what he saw, but he at no time related to me the very specific actions contained in the Grand Jury report. Regardless, it was clear that the witness saw something inappropriate involving Mr. Sandusky. As Coach Sandusky was retired from our coaching staff at that time, I referred the matter to university administrators.

I understand that people are upset and angry, but let's be fair and let the legal process unfold. In the meantime I would ask all Penn Staters to continue to trust in what that name represents, continue to pursue their lives every day with high ideals and not let these events shake their beliefs nor who they are. (Ganim, 2011)

The first portion of JoePa's statement, "*If true*, the nature and the amount of the charges made are very shocking to me and all Penn Staters. *While I did what I was supposed to with the one charge brought to my attention...*" closely aligns with SCCT's excuse strategies. As it is human

nature, his first statement is to defend himself in the eye of the public. He does, however, follow with empathy when he says he is deeply saddened by the allegations. There are also traces of sympathy for the victims in the second paragraph, explaining that the situation is “deeply troubling” and that he and his wife grieve on their behalf. However, there is a specific line in the second paragraph that is a denial strategy known as scapegoating. JoePa says, “*If this is true we were all fooled, along with the scores of professionals trained in such things....*” He is alluding to the fact that he did what he was supposed to, and it was the trained professionals who were made aware and did not do the proper thing. In addition, the phrase “we were all fooled” positions Penn State as a victim as well, as if no one saw it coming. The third paragraph is an excuse strategy, as he defends himself once more, describing the eyewitness report as lacking details of specific action and reminding the public that he did report the matter to University administrators. Finally, in his closing paragraph he requests the public to “be fair and let the legal process unfold.” A phrase such as this is stifling to the high level of intense emotions that many people were experiencing. He ends with an ingratiation technique, which is typically used as what SCCT calls a secondary crisis communication strategy when one praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization. JoePa praises the Penn State name and all that identify with it as “PennStaters” urging them to “continue to pursue their lives every day with high ideals and not let these events shake their beliefs nor who they are” (Ganim, 2011).

On November 8<sup>th</sup> the Board of Trustees released their initial response to the public:

The Board of Trustees of The Pennsylvania State University is outraged by the horrifying details contained in the Grand Jury Report. As parents, alumni and members of the Penn State Community, our hearts go out to all of those

impacted by these terrible events, especially the tragedies involving children and their families. We cannot begin to express the combination of sorrow and anger that we feel about the allegations surrounding Jerry Sandusky. We hear those of you who feel betrayed and we want to assure all of you that the Board will take swift, decisive action.

At its regular meeting on Friday, November 11, 2011, the Board will appoint a Special Committee, members of which are currently being identified, to undertake a full and complete investigation of the circumstances that gave rise to the Grand Jury Report. This Special Committee will be commissioned to determine what failures occurred, who is responsible and what measures are necessary to insure that this never happens at our University again and that those responsible are held fully accountable. The Special Committee will have whatever resources are necessary to thoroughly fulfill its charge, including independent counsel and investigative teams, and there will be no restrictions placed on its scope or activities. Upon the completion of this investigation, a complete report will be presented at a future public session of the Board of Trustees.

Penn State has always strived for honesty, integrity and the highest moral standards in all of its programs. We will not tolerate any violation of these principles. We educate over 95,000 students every year and we take this responsibility very seriously. We are dedicated to protecting those who are placed in our care. We promise you that we are committed to restoring public

trust in the University (Statement from the Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees, 2011).

The first sentence immediately sets the tone for the Board's declaration and focuses all of the attention on the victims. At no point does the Board defend Penn State or make an excuse for the actions that occurred on campus. They reiterate their "sorrow and anger" that they feel for the allegations, and they also address the emotional distress experienced by "all of those impacted by these terrible events, *especially* the tragedies involving children and their families." They close their first paragraph by saying, "We hear those of you who feel betrayed and we want to assure you that the Board will take swift, decisive action." That line is key because it not only makes the public aware that the University hears their pain and understands their outrage, but also makes a promise to take corrective action. The entire second paragraph explains in detail what the first step of corrective action will be. It offers some sort of condolence and peace of mind to the public, and to the victims, that truth and justice are being pursued and will be upheld. The Board finally ends with a bolstering strategy, a reminder of the past good works of the organization: "Penn State has always strived for honesty, integrity and the highest moral standards in all of its programs." "We educate over 95,000 students every year and we take this responsibility very seriously." The last line makes a promise to commit to restoring public trust in the University, which simultaneously acknowledges that trust has been lost and that, ultimately, the University is the only one responsible for it. While this is not a direct apology, in the sense of saying, "We're sorry," it is the closest thus far of all of the statements.

The last of the initial responses that the public received came from the Faculty Senate at Penn State's main campus on November 11:

This is a difficult time for our entire University, including our students, staff, alumni, faculty and administration. The Grand Jury report regarding the alleged actions of a former assistant athletics coach, along with the allegations of perjury and failure to report on the part of administrators, are of immense concern. Until the judicial process is completed, it is inappropriate to comment on the case. All people are entitled to a fair trial without prejudgment.

We call upon all members of the University community to rededicate ourselves to ensuring the integrity of our institution. Likewise, we are mindful of our collective role in contributing to providing a safe environment for all individuals who participate in our educational programs, and indeed in any activities associated with Penn State. Penn State's Faculty Senate will continue to do its part, and we urge all members of the University to act, as we believe the vast majority already do, in ways that bring honor to our institution and ourselves (Statement from Faculty Senate officers, Senate Council members, 2011).

The first line of the Faculty Senate's statement immediately situates Penn State as a victim. The second line states that the "alleged actions" and the "allegations of perjury and failure to report" are of immense concern. There was not a single expression of concern for the damage done to the victims' lives and the lives of their families. The Senate also declared that it was inappropriate to comment on the case. Crisis communication sources educate public relations professionals that it is never acceptable to say, "No comment," because it appears as if information or guilt is being hidden (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Despite the Senate's failure to address

the victims in the first paragraph, the second paragraph goes on to speak of the “integrity of the institution” and bringing “honor to our institution and *ourselves*,” still with no mention of the victims. The Senate is praising the members of the University for acting honorably, as they “believe the vast majority already do,” and reminding the public of the integrity and honor of the Penn State name, which is another ingratiation tactic. Again, the SCCT instructs that immediately after a crisis the initial responses should meet the physical and psychological needs of the target audience; it is not the time to make attempts at rebuilding organizational reputation.

Overall, according to the standards for appropriate response as outlined by Coombs’ (2007) SCCT, the initial crisis responses that Penn State put forward were poor. Most of the responses failed to meet the publics’ psychological needs but, instead, were treating the crisis as an accidental occurrence and using the SCCT’s specified techniques to communicate as if the crisis was accidental. However, whether or not Penn State believed that the crisis was accidental or un-preventable, the public viewed it to be preventable, hence their outrage. The public perception, partially due to the media representation, was that Penn State failed to take necessary measures to stop Sandusky’s actions. Based upon the three criteria that constitute an apologetic and/or sympathetic statement, the Board of Trustees issued the most effective response.

Although they used some bolstering techniques in closing as an attempt to repair Penn State’s name by reminding stakeholders of Penn State’s high moral standards, they did meet all three of the criteria. JoePa’s statement was the second most effective statement because he did make slight expressions of concern for the victims and their families. The media already disseminated the only information that he provided, and he gave the public no assurance that corrective action will be taken. The majority of his speech was spent making excuses for his action, or lack thereof. The Faculty Senate attempted to express concern and plans for corrective action;

however, each of the expressions focused more on Penn State rather than the victims and their families. Lastly, the very first statement that the public encountered came from the president of the University. If any individual could speak on behalf of Penn State, it would have been President Graham Spanier and, unfortunately, his initial response, as president, did not meet any of the public's psychological needs. The words that he spoke were not empathetic but were entirely defensive. It was not until he had lost his position as President that he was able to offer sympathy to the victims in his statement.

### **Communication to the Student Body**

Amidst Penn State's attempts to assuage the media and the public, the crisis seemed to intensify when the Board of Trustees announced, on November 9, that President Graham Spanier and Head Football Coach Joe Paterno no longer held their positions at the University, effective immediately (Board of Trustees, openness). They simultaneously announced that Dr. Rodney A. Erickson would be the interim president of Penn State and assistant coach Tom Bradley would take over as interim head coach. Thus, the next portion of crisis communications that will be discussed in this paper is mainly from President Rodney Erickson who emerged as the leader and primary spokesperson for the university. Comments by President Erickson were presented on the Penn State Openness website ([openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)), a website dedicated to keeping the Penn State community and its stakeholders informed about current events at Penn State University. The messages were originally sent via emails to the entire student body.

As the SCCT instructs, after the initial responses, there are specific strategies to be employed depending on the crisis type. The Penn State Sandusky scandal falls into the preventable crisis category, and, as was previously discussed, requires rebuild strategies, including compensation tactics and apology tactics (Coombs, 2007). The following analyses are

drawn from the various communication distributed by President Rodney Erickson with specific attention to their effectiveness to align with rebuilding strategies.

President Erickson immediately jumped into his role as president and issued the first of his many emails on November 10 (A message from Rodney Erickson). He began with recognition of the pain that afflicted many, victims, their families, and the Penn State community. He depicted the series of events as “one of the saddest weeks in Penn State history,” “devastating,” and a “terrible tragedy” to which his “heart goes out to the victimized and their families.” He also assured the community that the Penn State Board of Trustees is seeking corrective action. He informed his audience that the Board had ordered a full investigation “...to determine what failures occurred, who is responsible, and what measures are necessary to ensure that this never happens at our University again and that those responsible are held fully accountable” (A message from Rodney Erickson). After sympathizing and reassuring his audience that the university would take action on behalf of the victims, President Erickson switched to a bolstering strategy. He used ingratiation to praise and encourage the Penn State community to embrace solidarity over all that Penn State represents. Interestingly, he used the motto “WE ARE...PENN STATE,” as a format for his praises and by doing so, he emphasized feelings of honor and strength in his audience. He said, “*We are* 96,000 students, 46,000 employees, and more than a half a million alumni. *We are* 24 campuses across the Commonwealth and a World Campus. *We are* a university that is committed to its core values of honesty, integrity, and community. *We are* a university that will rebuild the trust and confidence that so many people have had in us for so many years.”

The second statement from Rodney Erickson was sent out to the Penn State system on November 11. By this point, Erickson was the official University president. He communicated



five promises that he, as the president of Penn State, would uphold and enforce. The first promise is to reinforce to the entire Penn State community the moral imperative of doing the right thing, the first time, every time. In order to uphold this promise, Erickson pledged to appoint an Ethics Officer that will revisit all standards, policies, and programs and report directly to him. The second promise is to be an exemplary leader, when he stated, “As I lead by example, I will expect no less of others.” Third, Erickson promised full disclosure, and said, “Penn State is committed to transparency to the fullest extent possible given the ongoing investigations.” Part of the third promise included providing meaningful, timely, and frequent updates as well as fostering an environment for dialogue within the Penn State community. In his fourth promise he stated, “We will be respectful and sensitive to the victims and their families. We will seek appropriate ways to foster healing and raise broader awareness of the issue of sexual abuse.” Lastly, President Erickson made a promise to the Penn State community with these words, “My administration will provide whatever resources, access and information is needed to support the Special Committee’s investigation. I pledge to take immediate action based on their findings.” Every one of his promises set forth standards to assure stakeholders that a crime such as sexual abuse would not happen on campus again and, in the horrendous case that it did, would be dealt with in an appropriate and just manner.

Another statement from President Erickson, on November 14, discussed his pride in “Penn Staters” (A Post-Weekend Message). He uses terms such as *character* and *resilience* to describe Penn Staters. Furthermore, Penn Stater has already been established as a familiar word in the Penn State community. It is a word that graduates of Penn State associate themselves with and proudly declare. They have already negotiated its meaning as strong, independent, proud, and caring leaders, and, as such, Penn Staters act in accordance with their perception of the word.

The use of “Penn Stater” automatically links the audience to a positive emotion and to a well-defined identity. He also expressed his pride in the students’ demonstrations of sympathy through their candlelight vigil, a Blue Out (signifying the color of sexual abuse) instead of a White Out, at the Penn State – Nebraska football game, and the athletes’ maturity and inspiring respect shown on the field. Erickson continues on in his statement to remind the readers that “*collectively, as a community*” there is a need to show that Penn State “*cares,*” “*moves forward,*” “*and remains purposeful.*”

On November 15, the student body received an email from the acting Vice President of Penn State, Rob Pangborn, which was later posted on the Penn State Openness website (A message to students, 2011). This statement was much like the others in its collective tone, as it addressed “Penn Staters” and core values of the Penn State community. Rob Pangborn began with an expression of a deep sympathy for the victims and the profound effects of the scandal on their academic lives. The remainder of the statement discussed the ways that the collective commitment of the University community could support the victims and prevent such crimes from occurring again. He attempts to unify the student body through phrases such as “the University remains true to its core values in pursuit of its fundamental purposes. At the very center of those values and purposes resides you, the students of Penn State.” Similarly he said, “*We* are frustrated by others’ misperceptions of *us*, which are based on the actions of a few.” Later on he comments that everyone “must be unified in our determination to remain true to the guiding principles that bind our learning community.” The whole email discusses the troubling facts and sadness that is overwhelming many, but Pangborn ends the email by restating what he has alluded to the entire time, “*Together*, we will pass through these difficult days and move

forward as *one* University...*together in spirit and purpose*. You are at the very center of that spirit and purpose, giving our University its fundamental resolve.”

On December 5, Rodney Erickson made another statement, which was later posted to the Penn State Openness website, in which he discussed specific initiatives that are being taken to uphold the five promises he had previously declared (The days ahead, 2011). His statement began, “...collectively we are returning to the urgency and importance of the academic work that fundamentally defines who we are.” He continued by identifying some of the initiatives, which include Penn State’s partnership with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Penn State also committed to donate \$1.5 million of their share of the Big Ten bowl proceeds to the aforementioned organizations. Erickson encouraged open dialogue with students and faculty with a series of town hall forums. He also stated that the University would take inventory of the available resources to aid in the prevention and healing of child sexual abuse. Again, Rodney Erickson closes the email with an update of the institution’s well-being. He addresses the exemplary qualities of Penn State using the “We are...” format:

We are defined by our exceptional teaching. We are defined by our \$805 million research enterprise that addresses complex and pressing issues such as food production, energy, health and well-being, national security and economic development. We are defined by our leadership and contributions in the arts and humanities. And we are defined by our service work that has improved countless lives around the globe. Penn Staters are defined by our hard work and accomplishments....

In this portion of his statement, President Erickson redirects readers' attention to the scholastic achievements of the school and reminds them of the outstanding educational programs that have made the University so strong. This emphasis draws attention away from athletics, specifically the Penn State football team and JoePa, and onto academia, which he assures readers is also part of Penn State's identity. President Erickson revisited many of these same notions in his earlier statement on December 13. Specifically, he addressed many common questions and concerns across the Penn State system and also around the world such as "What is Penn State doing to help combat the problem of child abuse?," "Last week *USA Today* reported that Penn State is rethinking the role of the football program. What does that mean?," "What investigations are under way at Penn State, and how do we know they are sufficiently independent?," and "What is your reaction to the allegations in the Grand Jury presentment?" By addressing these questions, he reassured his publics that he has heard their concerns and their questions and, by answering them, he brought a renewed sense of peace and trust to certain fears or worries that people had.

The final piece of communication used here for analysis was sent to address the student body on March 12, 2012. This was sent four and a half months after the scandal went public, yet it is the most crucial email that has been sent to the student body thus far. A report of the Board of Trustees concerning their November 9 decisions, the removal of Graham Spanier and Joe Paterno from their active roles in the University (Report of the Board of Trustees, 2012), was posted to the Penn State openness website, as well as being sent in an email to the student body. In this report, the Board clearly stated their reasons for the decisions made to fire Joe Paterno and Graham Spanier. Most of the student body and many loyal Penn State fans were outraged when JoePa was fired. It would have been to the University's advantage, according to the SCCT model of communication, to provide some sort of reasoning for these decisions when the men were

fired, or very shortly after, in order to calm some of the concerns and confusion shared by many. Whether or not the students agreed or disagreed with the reasoning, from a crisis communication perspective, it would have been “respectful” to provide them with an explanation. Up until this point, there was no mention of the Board’s decision process; all that the students knew was what the media told them, which was that JoePa was abruptly fired over the phone.

### **Student Responses to the Scandal**

Based on standards set by the SCCT model, the manner in which the crisis communication was initially handled (that is, lack of communication or clarity over the Paterno/Sandusky firings) was problematic for the student body. As earlier explained, the model states that a crisis creates a need for immediate information to stabilize the publics’ fears and to help them cope. Publics also desire information about what corrective action is underway to fix the problem. It is also important to provide an apologetic expression of concern for the victims.

After hearing the news on Wednesday night, November 9, students rioted at Penn State University Park’s (main campus) administration building before moving into the downtown streets (*NYTimes*). The students were heard marching down the streets yelling, “WE ARE PENN STATE.” Eventually some of the rioting students began to chant, “tip the van,” and tip the van they did. The news van toppled over, and one student was quoted as saying, “I think the point people are trying to make is the media is responsible for JoePa going down.” The crowd continued to display unruly behavior and let their emotions dictate their disruptive acts. Two lampposts were knocked down, rocks were thrown, air horns were blown, and fireworks were thrown. Another student tried to defend his angry classmates and explained, “I’m sure JoePa wouldn’t want this, but this is just an uproar now. We’re finding a way to express our anger.”

Some may say that the student body rioting did not embody Penn State values that night. George Herbert Mead's (Blumer, 1969) theory of symbolic interactionism, however, help explains the students' behavior. Symbolic interactionism requires an individual to interpret an act, a motion, an object, a picture, or a group of people, etc. and to internalize the interpretation such that the individual acts in a way that defines the same interaction for others. This theory posits that symbols are learned and acquired and acted upon in such a manner. Therefore, it is understandable that the students have interpreted JoePa as a symbol of Penn State football and Penn State football as a symbol of their identity as Penn Staters. "WE ARE...Penn State!" is a defining motto for Penn State students and there is not one Penn State football game where the crowd does not enthusiastically echo the cheer back and forth to each other. The traditional White Out games are part of the Penn State culture as well. Every Penn Stater that attends a White Out game dresses in white so that the entire side of their stadium is "white-ed out," a representation of support and enthusiasm for the Penn State football team during a big game, not to mention hundreds to thousands of people preface every Penn State home game with infamous tailgates. There are many other traditions that surround the Penn State football team (Penn State Rich), but it is clear that the student body has established their oneness and their identity as a Penn Stater through these traditions and JoePa embodies it all.

When the Board removed JoePa without the appropriate measures to provide information and to assuage stakeholders' concerns, the students interpreted that as removing an integral part of how they understood/demonstrated their Penn State pride, dignity and their bond. They acted in a way that defined their distaste for the Board, their resentment, their anger, and their mourning. So, they did in fact act in a way they interpreted to be like "Penn Staters." They fought for their leader, and they displayed their support in a communicated act of unity. This

behavior was fueled by the information that *was* available; that is, the information about the event as reported in the media. It might be helpful, in a follow-up study, to explore the impact of the media on the student body.

The communication from Penn State to the student body does not fully adhere to the apology and compensation tactics as outlined by the SCCT. As the previously discussed statements show, there were many bolstering strategies that were utilized. Ingratiation, reminder, and victimage tactics were all used to prompt the Penn State students to embody the values and integrity of Penn State. The emails used the “WE ARE...” format to symbolize and reestablish Penn State values as resilient, committed, caring, scholastic, supportive, and respectful. Terms like “community,” “together,” “one University,” and “one purpose” were used to rekindle Penn State unity. Students were being reminded that the core of their Penn State identity rested on helping the helpless and caring for the oppressed. Although, there were also references to compensation techniques in order to benefit the victims of abuse.

The SCCT would render the messages as ineffective based upon their failure to meet the standards of handling a preventable crisis. However, the most crucial component to image repair is probably the dependency of the audience receiving and embracing the strategies that are being used. The effectiveness of crisis communication can be determined by the behavioral response of the stakeholders. Negative behavioral responses occur when the audience judges the organization to be responsible and anger is evoked (Weiner, 2006). Positive behavioral responses occur when the audience judges the organization not to be responsible and sympathy is evoked. It cannot be said, however, that the crisis communication strategies incorporated by Penn State were wholly ineffective. Indeed, the slow and nebulous initial reactions seemed detrimental, given the boisterous student demonstrations and rowdy behaviors; yet, later messages did inspire positive

outcomes in various segments of the student body. Soon to be discussed, positive responses by the student body such as candlelight vigils, student inspired town hall forums and various fundraising efforts, indicate that the messages from Penn State were also effective.

### **Crisis Communication as a Dialogic**

According to Bakhtin, dialogue exists at the boundary between two consciousnesses (Bakhtin, 1996). Thus, dialogue, or utterance, is not an individual act of communication, but rather the intersection of two acts of communication. Bakhtin also describes dialogue as the “simultaneous fusion and differentiation of voices.” Social interaction revolves around conversation, a mutual agreement or unity between the participants, which also fosters individual perspectives. Each relationship is negotiated in the dialogic space that exists between the two parties. This suggests that during organizational crisis the dialogue with each public must be different because each relationship is different. Therefore, the assumption of the SCCT that a crisis type defines the attitudes of all publics assumes that the negotiation of crisis responsibility takes place within the individual rather than being contextualized within inter-party conversation. Rather, the relationship between an organization and a particular group of publics is actually the contextual basis in which the publics will determine crisis responsibility. For example, the SCCT encourages the use of rebuilding strategies in crisis communication following a preventable crisis. Rebuild strategies include apology and compensation tactics according to the SCCT. However, not every public will attribute high organizational responsibility for the crisis and therefore may not require the same communication strategies as the publics who do attribute high organizational responsibility. Similarly, each group of publics may have its own perception of the crisis. Some may view a crisis as accidental, some as preventable, and still others may view it as a victim crisis.



In the case of the Sandusky scandal as it related to the Penn State student body, it appears as if most of the students originally viewed the crisis as an accidental crisis in which they did not hold Penn State highly responsible for the crimes that occurred on campus, and they most certainly did not find JoePa responsible for the crimes that occurred. Although the firing of JoePa evoked strong negative emotion and behavior from some of the students, such sentiment was understandable given his significance to the student body. Students were left with questions such as, “Where do we go from here?” (Penn State Town Hall). Consequently, the reminder and ingratiation tactics used by President Erickson and Vice President Rob Pangborn were key to restoring the faith and trust of this particular public. The students desperately needed a reminder of what Penn State represents as well as the character a Penn Stater should embody. Students needed to be praised for their long-standing attributes of courage, kindness, strength, and honor and be encouraged to not stop in the wake of disaster. They required a new message to identify with, a new Penn State to identify with, a Penn State that had always been there but had simply been overlooked and overshadowed by football glory for so long. These sentiments were reflected in the later statements sent by university administrators. It is imperative for an organization not only to understand the values and norms of a given public but also to have a solid understanding of the relational dynamics they share with that public. This basis of understanding will ensure that their concerns are properly addressed and that the proper communication strategies can be utilized.

### **The Impact on Branch Campuses: Penn State Berks**

The relational space that exists between Penn State and the student body is especially evident when examining the branch campuses and communication as a dialogic as it exists between them. Using the Berks campus as an example, I will provide an example of the

individual-group identity dissonance that occurred within the branch campuses. Every branch campus is obviously a part of the Penn State system and identifies with the Penn State name and, accordingly, most students at these campuses align themselves with the values and norms of Penn Staters. Furthermore, Penn State culture, speaking in terms of the entire system, is formed at the main campus and the branch campuses are left to negotiate this culture as both an insider and outsider of the Penn State system, as their own campus, with their individual culture. The events of the crisis illustrated this dissonance as many students from branch campuses began enacting their identity as proud ‘Penn Staters’ and organized events, fundraisers, vigils, town halls and much more.

Penn State Berks is one of Penn State’s branch campuses and, as a student who attends the campus, I was able to actively watch and participate in the events that dealt with the intense emotions coursing through our campus. Berks did many things that mimicked the actions at Penn State main campus and thus solidified our identification with Penn Staters. Students held a candlelight vigil in remembrance of JoePa while Penn State Berks’ Chancellor Hillkirk spoke of Paterno as the head of the Penn State family. Students also arranged a mini protest and marched around the campus. They chanted, “WE ARE...Penn State”, “P...S...U” and “JoePa back! JoePa back!” Some students led the crowd with messages of anger and disgust at the Board’s decisions as the rest of the crowd encouraged them with cheers of agreement. Bull horns and cow bells also accompanied the screams of the angry students (Joe Paterno Protest). However, there were also student-run events that were unique to Penn State Berks. The “We Care” event was one of these events. The event was designed to raise awareness of child sexual abuse and to raise funds for a local organization that helps children that are victims of sexual abuse. The other aspect of the event was a town hall forum, which was designed to create a space where students, teachers,

and faculty could discuss important facts and emotions that needed to be spoken and heard (Gregg, 2011). I was one of the coordinators of the event. The vision behind it was “We are...Penn State Berks...and we care.” We wanted to make a statement about our own culture and our own identity as Penn Staters, yet also recognize ourselves as part of the Penn State system. We are Penn State, but we are also Penn State Berks. It is often difficult to embody the two simultaneously. Such negotiations exemplify Bakhtinian (1996) notions of the dialogic; that as a branch campus, Penn State Berks is in a constant negotiation over its place in the system and its identity as a campus in end of itself. Many other campuses did similar things in order to show their associated commonalities and individualities as well. Penn State Great Valley started a “Penn Staters against Child Abuse” campaign, Penn State York designed a pledge tree in which members of their community took a pledge against child abuse and signed their names on a Lion paw print and placed it on the tree, Penn State Shenango created an event that included presentations on child abuse and the impact on victims, and Penn State Harrisburg, along with others, held forums to discuss child abuse and the impact of the crisis in their communities (Penn State Openness).

## **Conclusion**

Although Penn State communicated to its student body with overarching messages of Penn State values and beliefs, there were still problems with initial responses as well as individual considerations that could not be addressed within the forms of crisis communication employed. For the students, there was a need for a reminder and redefinition of Penn State’s identity after the man that resembled the face of the University for so long had been removed. However, despite the strong messages of reassurance that were sent forth, there were many

students who still struggled to find their bearings in the wake of the crisis, whether that was about the student's identity within the system at large or within branch campuses. Penn State's communication acted as a dialogic, sending messages that upheld certain features of Penn State identity. Campuses and individuals alike responded with their interpretations of Penn State: for some, it was anger and devastation at the removal of a symbolic figure; for others, it was rising above and orchestrating events; and yet for others, it was a quiet mourning that expressed heartfelt sympathy.

Relational tensions cannot be escaped, especially in a crisis situation. No matter the communication strategy and no matter the public, there will always be a unique response due to the relational dynamic. There may be some strategies such as those offered by the SCCT that are better to use than others given a specific crisis or public, but it is key always to understand the public, invest in the public, and communicate with the public. The crisis will never fade into the forgotten realm, nor will the pain or the anger be erased, but continual communication is the key to deal with those emotions as a present negotiation in order to move forward. Relationships are formed and are maintained within the boundaries of communication, and it is in this contextual space that opinions and beliefs will also be formed and maintained, such as the publics' determination of crisis responsibility. So I believe, in contradiction to other scholars who call for a more quantitative or static approach to crisis communication, that there is no such realistic attainment of that goal. Relationships are dynamic, communication is dynamic, and publics are dynamic. Organizations must learn to exist in the dialogic space if they are to be successful in repairing their reputation.

## REFERENCES

- A Brief Penn State History*. (2006). Retrieved February 3, 2012, from <http://www.psu.edu/ur/about/historyshort.html>
- Ahluwalia, R., Burnkrant, R.E., and Unnava, H.R. (2000). Consumer response to negative publicity: The moderating role of commitment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27, 203-214.
- A Message from Rodney Erickson*. (2011). Retrieved February 25, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- A Message to Students*. (2011). Retrieved February 25, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- A Post-Weekend Message from Rodney Erickson*. (2011) Retrieved March 1, 2012 from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Benoit, W. L. (1997). Hugh Grant's Image Restoration Discourse: An Actor Apologizes. *Communication Quarterly*, 45(3). 251-267.
- Board of Trustees announces leadership changes at Penn State*. (2011). Retrieved March 1, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspectives and methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Child sex charges filed against Jerry Sandusky; two top Penn State University officials charged with perjury & failure to report suspected child abuse*. (2011). Retrieved November 15, 2011, from <http://www.attorneygeneral.gov/press.aspx?id=6270>
- Coombs, W.T. (1998). An analytic framework for crisis situations: Better responses from a better understanding of the situation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10, 177-191.

- Coombs, W.T., and Holladay, S.J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16, 165-186.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10 (3), 163-176.
- Coons, S. (2010). *Penn State rich in football traditions*. Retrieved March 20, 2012, from <http://www.yorkblog.com/psu/2010/02/penn-state-rich-in-football-traditions.html>
- Dawar, N. and Pillutla, M.M. (2000). Impact of product-harm crises on brand equity: The moderating role of consumer expectations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27, 215-226.
- Dean, D.H. (2004). Consumer reaction to negative publicity: Effects of corporate reputation, response, and responsibility for a crisis event. *Journal of Business Communication*, 41, 192-211.
- Fearn-Banks, K. (1996). *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Foss, S. K. (1989). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Ganim, S. (2011, November 6). Penn State coach Joe Paterno says he was only told witness had seen Jerry Sandusky doing 'something inappropriate' in the shower. *Patriot News*. Retrieved from [http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2011/11/joe\\_paterno\\_issues\\_statement\\_a.html](http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2011/11/joe_paterno_issues_statement_a.html)
- Gregg, B. Y. (2011, December 8). From Scandal, PSU Berks Adopts Cause. *Reading Eagle*. Retrieved from <http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=351010>

*Joe Paterno's Full Statement.* (2011). Retrieved November 18, 2011, from

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/joe-paternos-full-statement/story?id=14914677#.T4Mfu46KVq4>

*Joe Paterno Protest: Penn State Berks Campus.* (2011). Retrieved March 13, 2012, from

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4QqMzXKhyg>

Kim, S., Avery, E. J., Lariscy, R. W. (2009). Are crisis communicators practicing what we

preach? : An evaluation of crisis response strategy analyzed in public relations research from

1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 446-448.

*Our History.* (2010). Retrieved February 3, 2012, from <http://bk.psu.edu/Information/ourhist.htm>

Patel, A. and Reinsch, L. (2003). Companies can apologize: Corporate apologies and legal

liability. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 66, 17-26.

*Paterno's impact spanned generations.* (2012). Retrieved March 30, 2012, from

<http://live.psu.edu/story/57346>

*Penn State Abuse Scandal: A Guide and Timeline.* (2012). Retrieved January 18, 2012, from

<http://www.npr.org/2011/11/08/142111804/penn-state-abuse-scandal-a-guide-and-timeline>

*Penn State Town Hall.* (2012). Retrieved March 13, 2012, from

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFYbgDrztTM&feature=youtu.be>

*Quick Facts.* (2010). Retrieved February 3, 2012, from

<http://bk.psu.edu/Information/quickfacts.htm>

*Report of the Board of Trustees concerning Nov. 9 decisions.* (2012). Retrieved March 13, 2012,

from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)

Rousseau, D. M. (2006). Is there such a thing as evidence-based management. *Academy of*

*Management Review*, 31, 256-269.

- Sellnow, T.L., Ulmer, R.R. and Snider, M. (1998). The compatibility of corrective action in organizational crisis communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 46, 60-74.
- Statement by Graham Spanier*. (2011). Retrieved March 1, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Statement by the Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees*. (2011). Retrieved March 25, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Statement from Faculty Senate officers, Senate Council members*. (2011). Retrieved March 1, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Statement from President Spanier*. (2011). Retrieved March 25, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Sturges, D.L. (1994). Communicating through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 7, 297-316.
- The days ahead*. (2011). Retrieved March 1, 2012, from [openness.psu.edu](http://openness.psu.edu)
- Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychology Review*, 92, 548-573.
- Weiner, B. (2006). *Social Motivation, Justice, and the Moral Emotions: An Attributional Approach*, Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, Inc., Mahwah, NJ.
- Where We Stand: Current Rankings*. (2011). Retrieved February 3, 2012, from <http://www.psu.edu/ur/rankings/>



VITA  
**Ashton Tupper**

302-2 Beverly Court  
Shillington, PA 19607  
[Amt5059@psu.edu](mailto:Amt5059@psu.edu)

**Education:**

Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts and Sciences,  
Penn State University  
Spring 2011  
Minor in Business  
Honors in Communication Arts and Sciences  
Thesis Title: Dialectical Relationships as a Prominent Role in Crisis  
Communication: A Penn State University Case Study  
Thesis Advisor: Cheryl Nicholas

**Related Experience:**

Independent study with Habitat for Humanity  
Developed Public Relations Plan for Reading branch  
Supervisor: Catherine Catanach and Jay Worrall  
Spring 2011

Internship with Boscovs Department Store  
Headquarters – Public Relations Office  
Supervisor: Beth Ann Katz  
Summer 2011

Event Planner and Coordinator for “WE CARE”  
Penn State Berks event benefiting sexually abused children  
Supervisor: Cheryl Nicholas  
Fall 2011

**Awards:**

Dean’s List  
Lambda Pi Eta Communication Arts and Sciences Honors Society  
Boscov College Scholarship  
Boscov Excellence Award