ACT I

STORY TELLING FUNDAMENTALS
STORIES ARE EVERYWHERE
WHAT IS A STORY?

- Something told, recounted, written, sung, performed
- A chain of events that start in one place and finish somewhere else (R. Jarrell)
- Words, images, lyrics, that recreate real life or create imagined life
- A fundamental human activity
WHY WE TELL STORIES

- We tell stories to discover each other
- We tell stories to express our history
- We tell stories to solve problems
- We tell stories to feel something
- We tell stories to give order and meaning to our lives
- We tell stories in order to learn how to live
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOOD AND BAD STORY?

- Credibility and Plausibility
- Emotional Impact
- Bigger Vision:
  - Stories tell us something about how we live now
  - Stories tell us who we are, what we are, why we are
  - Stories present our higher selves, ambitions, dreams
WHAT DO BRANDING AND STORYTELLING HAVE IN COMMON?

- Both are about persuasion
- Both seek to connect on a deeper, interpersonal level
- Both work in a communication framework defined by time
  - Story=narrative
  - Brand=launch
WHY IS BRAND STORYTELLING SO POPULAR?

- Social media, content and digital marketing have made marketing conversational, people-based
- Storytelling is the foundation for nearly all major media
- There’s a natural connection between narrative and branding
WHY TELL BRAND STORIES?

- A brand story raises your brand above the level of commodity, helps you differentiate because no one else can tell your story
- A brand story creates something people can invest in and care about
- A brand story creates relationships and builds loyalty
WHAT IS A BRAND STORY?

- It’s the essence of who you are (origin story)
- It’s the whole picture of your institution, facts, feelings, details, emotions, all wrapped up into an attractive narrative
- It’s about everything you do and how you communicate it
CANC YOU FEEL IT?

Juniata College: Think about Who You Are

http://think.juniata.edu/stories/article/finding-another-home.php
WHEN AND WHERE DO BRAND STORIES START?

- Every audience member builds a relationship with your brand long before they invest in you.
- Your story starts with the connection an audience member makes when they hear your name for the first time.
- Your story succeeds by virtue of its relationship with your audiences.
DISCUSSION/EXERCISE

PITCH PHASE I: (15 Minutes)
Write your institution’s past, present and future history
Limit it to one paragraph or 100 words
Focus on:
- Why your institution was founded
- What is its purpose and dream
- Where it is going
BRAINSTORMING RULES
(IDEO)

- Defer judgment
- Encourage wild ideas
- Build on the ideas of others
- Stay focused on the topic
- One conversation at a time

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STORIES TAKE US SOMEWHERE
NARRATION

- The foundation for all storytelling
- Organizing device: The arrangement of events, an ordering of raw material from life
- Movement through time: it provides momentum, a through line people can follow
HOW NARRATION WORKS

- Aristotle: 3 Act Structure: Beginning, middle, end
- Joseph Campbell: Hero’s Journey
- Modernists: Joyce, Proust, Woolf and the narrative of consciousness
- Meta Freaks & Postmodernists: narrative about narrative
- Remember: there are many ways to tell a story
WHAT FUELS NARRATION

Conflict: the driving force behind all stories
Conflict works on tension, mystery, suspense
Conflict isn’t always negative:

- Stories about overcoming adversity
- Stories about personal and/or group triumphs
- Stories about standing up for causes
HOW NARRATION WORKS: COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

- Big machine/entity with many moving parts
- University brand story similar to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, Boccaccio's Decameron, Elizabeth Strout’s Olive Kittredge
- These are large multi-story ensemble pieces
- Challenge: what’s the structure that pulls it all together
MANY STORIES

University of Washington

BE BOUNDLESS

http://www.washington.edu/boundless/

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BUILDING YOUR INSTITUTIONAL STORY

- Create a story that works through several characters and mediums
- Create a story that builds through continuous growth: one piece feeding off the next
- Create a story that leaves them wanting more
FINDING YOUR NARRATIVE CORNERSTONE

Your narrative cornerstone anchors all of your stories by:

- Providing the starting point or origin
- Conveying the what, the why and the how of your identity
  - Story vs. plot: story=what, plot=why, structure=how
- The combination creates movement/momentum
WORKING THROUGH CHARACTER

- No character, no story
- Character movement and growth drives narrative
- Character identification, attraction, fascination attracts audiences
- Character is defined by what he/she/they want and what they do to get it
WE USE CHARACTERS IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

- Create a character or mascot (Flo, Mayhem,)
- Use real people: employees, students, faculty, alumni, friends
- Empower people to narrate stories in which they become characters
- Your brand’s community are characters who tell your story
SHOWING VS. TELLING

- We believe what we see more than what we hear
- What we see: visual imagery, textual detail
- What we see: people and things in motion
- Challenge: balance between verbal and visual
- Greater Challenge: how do we see what we say
SEE IT

University of Melbourne: Where Great Minds Collide

http://collision.unimelb.edu.au/#layer-video

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VOICE & TONE

- The central authority or intelligence through which the events of the story are related, the narrator(s)
- Tone of your communications and writing style
- Brand stories have singular and multiple voices
- Brand stories work through changes in tone, style, manner and format of speaking
HOW TO DEFINE YOUR INSTITUTIONAL VOICE

- Describe your voice in 3 personality words: bold, down-to-earth, warm

- Set 3 words in opposition to define them:
  - Bold but Approachable
  - Down to Earth but Intellectual
  - Warm but Real
HOW TO DEFINE YOUR INSTITUTIONAL VOICE II

- Determine how your audiences communicate:
  - Formal
  - Casual
  - Conversational

- Find POV matches the story you’re telling and is consistent within context

- “We” vs. “you” vs. “they”
HOW TO DEFINE YOUR INSTITUTIONAL VOICE III

- Check for authenticity
- Check your competition for tone and attitude
- Test your tone on strangers: how does it sound to people who don’t know you?
- Review your content
- Create a voice bible, chart, dictionary
PITCH PHASE II: (15 Minutes)

Based on the history you’ve written, tell your brand story in a single sentence using this format:

This is a story about a_________who__________and_____

Translation: This is a story about (your character) who (does something about what it wants) and (which results in). To do this:

• Define your institution as a character
• Articulate what your character wants
• Tell us how your (institution) character will get what it wants and what will happen when it does.
ACT III

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING
STORY VS. FACTS AND FIGURES

- Brand stories connect with your core audiences in ways that go beyond facts, figures, and grand pronouncements
- Brand stories address thoughts, feelings, actions
- Brand stories make data meaningful
CREATING EMPATHY

- Who are you creating stories for?
- How does your story connect to the prospective student? Donor? Alum?
- At what point in their stories does your story connect?
- How do you convey empathy for your audiences?
CAPTURING AUTHENTICITY

- Strong brand stories are honest and transparent, rooted in the reality of your institutional character
- Strong brand stories are consistent
- Strong brand stories persist across a variety of avenues and mediums
- Strong brand stories stand up for the right things
THIS IS REAL

Western Sydney University: Stories of Unlimited


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IMPORTANCE OF DETAIL

- Brand stories depend on detail to convey character, setting, action, drama and strategy
- A world described in such detail, in other words, that the reader never once doubts the created reality--the reader is never once awoken from it until it ends.
- Colleges and universities have a lot of detail: how to use it
- Detail is a differentiating factor
BRAND STORYTELLING TO-DO LIST

- Integrate data into storytelling, not the other way around
- Get help: use influencers to help tell your story
- Word of mouth: strongest marketing there is. GenZ big influencers are family, friends, classmates—how can you get into that circle of influence?
- Depend on perpetual marketing tactics, transmedia marketing, etc.
- Make sure brand strategy and story work together (Paul Redfern, Inside Higher Ed)
- Find brand stories that intuitively fit the right channels
- Take advantage of every opportunity for a brand story.
PRINCIPLES OF STORYTELLING

- Be Interesting
- Be Memorable
- Be Engaging
- Be True
- Be Powerful
PITCH PHASE III: (15 – 20 Minutes)

Pitch your institutional brand story. To do so:

• Keep it to a single sentence
• Choose your best pitcher
• Sell us
CAMPAIGNS WORTH LOOKING AT

Stony Brook University: Far Beyond
http://www.stonybrook.edu/brand/

California State University, Fullerton: Titans Reach Higher
http://reachhigher.fullerton.edu/

Southeast Missouri State University: The Will to Do
http://www.semo.edu/

UCLA: The Optimists
http://www.ucla.edu/optimists/

University of Florida: For the Gator Good
http://gatorgood.ufl.edu/

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“NO ONE BUYS THE FEATURES. THEY BUY A STORY.”

SETH GODIN
THANK YOU!
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