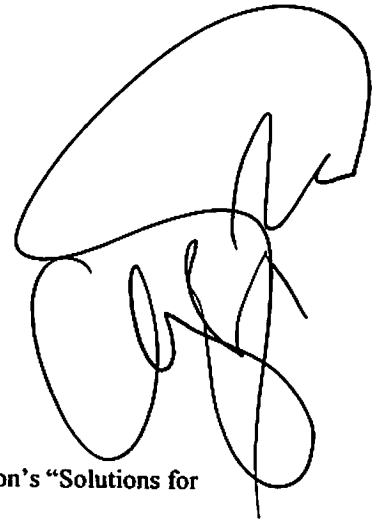


SPEAKING OF HIGHER EDUCATION:
DOCUMENTING, INTERPRETING, AND ADVANCING
THE ACADEMY'S RHETORIC

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This dissertation – a three-part rhetorical critique of the American Council on Education's "Solutions for Our Future" (*Solutions*) campaign – addresses the following question: What images, ideas, and identities of higher education vis-à-vis the public are portrayed by the *Solutions* campaign, and how do they help us understand challenges and opportunities inherent in advancing the academy's rhetoric?

Chapter one describes the context, rationale, and approach to addressing this question. The role that rhetoric can play to redress the problem of "market forces" in the contemporary higher learning landscape is illustrated. Key concepts from rhetorical theory and public sphere studies are delineated. Finally, the project's modes of inquiry – the identification of *Solutions* as a "critical case" and how it was examined – are detailed.

Chapter two – the first of three essays – addresses the concept of "paradigmatic rationality" in light of the *Solutions* campaign. Specifically, the essay examines the "narrative rationality" presupposed by *Solutions* and argues that its circumscription of higher education in that paradigm reinforces the chasm between the academy and the public.

Chapter three presents an analysis of the "voice" employed by the *Solutions* texts. Specifically, the essay illustrates differences between and implications of a voice for higher education that seeks to identify with the public and a voice that invites the public to identify with higher education.

Chapter four focuses on the *Solutions* television commercials, all of which utilize humor in an effort to persuade the public of higher education's significance to society. For contrast, the essay also analyzes the comedy of three other television commercials produced for Stanford University's "Hail, Stanford, Hail" initiative. The essay raises questions regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with "clowning" on the part of the academy.

Chapter five reviews key ideas from the three foregoing essays with an eye toward informing future scholarship. Specifically, it presents an analysis of the "us-them" ("academy"- "public") construct that persists throughout the *Solutions* campaign – and the preceding examinations of it – in order to question the utility of employing such a vantage point in the study and practice of higher education rhetoric.