NDSU NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty Research Series on Engaged Citizenship and Inclusion

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A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRESIDENT'S EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS IN 2020 AND 2021

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Abstract: Email communications from presidents to faculty, students, and staff communicate institutional priorities; they play an important role in shaping the ways that power, ideology, and influence are constructed and replicated across the institution (Serrano, 2018; McNaughtan & McNaughtan, 2018; Eddy, 2003; 2005; Briscoe, 2022). In this study, I explored presidential email communications sent between June 2020 and November 2021 across 11 public institutions in the United States. Eddy (2005; 2005) argued that university presidents have a responsibility to communicate as sense-makers during crises to help direct the campus conversation and to set the institutional agenda. As such, I sought better understanding of the nature of Higher Education presidential communications to expand knowledge of presidential communication styles and approaches to communicating institutional priorities. Specifically, using a Critical Discourse Analytic approach to data analysis, I sought to understand how the language used in emails were indicative of presidential and institutional priorities and if and how linguistic tool usage were utilized differently according to the topic.

Laura Parson is an Assistant Professor of Educational and Organizational Leadership in the School of Education at NDSU. Her Ph.D. is in Teaching & Learning, Higher Education from the University of North Dakota. Laura's research seeks to identify where and how institutional disjunctures occur in higher education for women and members of minoritized groups. She is a qualitative methodologist, with a focus on ethnographic and discourse methods of inquiry. Her research questions seek to understand how policy, procedures, discourses, and institutional environments inform student experiences, and how the institution coordinates those factors through translocal practices. Building on that research, she uses policy and curriculum to recreate the teaching and learning environment in higher education to promote equitable and effective learning spaces. She maintains public scholarship at lauraparson.com.

By Dr. Parson

[Are STEM Syllabi Gendered? A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis](#) (2016)

This study explored the gendered nature of STEM higher education institution through a feminist critical discourse analysis of STEM course syllabi from a Midwest research university. I explored STEM syllabi to understand how linguistic features such as stance and interdiscursivity are used in the syllabus and how language and discourses used in the syllabus replicate the masculine nature of STEM education. Findings suggest that the discourses identified in the syllabi reinforce traditional STEM academic roles, and that power and gender in the STEM syllabi are revealed through exploration of the themes of knowledge, learning, and the teaching and learning environment created by the language used in the syllabus. These findings inform and extend understanding of the STEM syllabus and the STEM higher education institution and lead to recommendations about how to make the STEM syllabus more inclusive for women.

[Digital media responses to a feminist scholarly article: a critical discourse analysis](#) (2019)

In this critical discourse analysis, I identified the linguistic tools and discourses used in the articles, blog posts, discussion forums, and tweets published in response to my article on STEM in Higher Education that identified gendered discourses in instructional language. Beginning from the standpoint of the author of the journal article, I examined digital media publications to understand how linguistic tools such as stance and deixis were used to convey meaning, emotion, and power and negotiated through language. Analysis suggested that linguistic tools and trolling strategies seen throughout the corpus were used to generate support for calls to denounce the research and silence me, as the author of the journal article. These findings provide insight into how opposition to academic feminist work builds, in many cases, in reaction to the recontextualization of the research instead of responding to the research itself.

[The Language of Retrenchment: A Discourse Analysis of Budget Cutting in Higher Education](#) (with Gross & Williams, 2019)

In times of economic hardship and declining public support, institutions can generate more revenue or reduce expenditures, referred to as retrenchment, to meet their resource needs. Yet, scholarship on organizational approaches to retrenchment is scarce. Analysis of corpus data suggested that the language used in SRI and URU's budget emails was tailored to generate support for university leadership's authority and plans to resolve the crisis.

Related Articles

[Framing the role of the leader: How community college presidents construct their leadership](), Eddy (2005)

Presidents are one of the most studied of administrative roles, yet little research occurs on understanding how these leaders construct their own leadership. Thus, the question guiding the research reported here concerned how community college presidents cognitively framed their leadership roles. Findings uncovered 3 themes. The first theme identified how the presidents' underlying mental maps guided decision-making and leadership on campus. The second theme linked the basic cognitive orientation of the presidents with on-going situated cognition in their new work settings. Learning evolved based on environmental factors. The final category highlighted the dynamic and changing nature of the presidents' leadership role. The findings from the research reported underscore that college presidents are constantly learning and adjusting their conceptions of leadership.

[Crafting the message: The complex process behind presidential communication in higher education](), McNaughtan & Pal (2019)

University presidents engage in formal and informal communication through multiple modes of communication. This study provides insight into the process that university presidents engage in when crafting public statements. Results highlight the president's perception of their role as instigator of communication, the involvement of other senior leaders, and insight into the complex process of creating presidential communications. Implications include the need for presidents to develop their own formal communication process, the importance of being intentional with who communicates, and the need to develop communication teams to craft messages.

["Failing to respond": Black graduate students' perceptions of a university president's responses to racialized incidents](), Briscoe (2022)

This qualitative case study examined Black graduate students' perceptions of a university president's responses to racialized incidents. Findings show the lack of institutional response strategies that the president used and how participants viewed the president's responses to racialized incidents as untimely, inadequate, and inappropriate. The president's responses through campus statements underscored nonperformative and anti-Blackness rhetoric from the participants' vantage point, displaying a lack of action-oriented language, next steps, and strategies to assist them during the aftermath of the incidents. This study further illustrates the significance of the presidency's role when addressing race and racism issues and how their responses have the power to disrupt or harm the personal lived experiences of Black graduate students.