

Accountability Report presented to MCET

from the Chair in Brand Communication for the period of July 2018 - June 2019

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ADVANCING BRANDING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH ACROSS CANADA

In 2011, the **Marketing Communications Education Trust (MCET)** generously committed \$1,865,000 to Laurier's Lazaridis School of Business & Economics to establish a Chair in Brand Communication. This Chair has a mandate to support the development, promotion and advancement of brand communication education and training in Canada.

This year, Sarah J. S. Wilner, Associate Professor, Marketing and Chair in Brand Communication, was on sabbatical, focusing on her research into the influence of design thinking in organizations and the impact of product development and branding on user adoption of previously stigmatized products. She remained actively engaged as Chair, assisting in the development of branding education and practice in Canada while deepening her understanding of it, and presenting her research to scholars, educators and industry practitioners.

We hope you will enjoy her report providing details of these activities.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR IN BRAND COMMUNICATION FOR 2018-19

I have been on sabbatical during the 2018-19 academic year, meaning that I was exempted from my usual teaching load in order to focus on the research portion of my job. The sabbatical afforded me many opportunities to advance branding education and research in Canada and fulfill my mandate as Chair in Brand Communication. I was a juror for McMaster's Canada's Next Top Ad Exec competition, an advisor for two educational institutions' branding programming development, and I presented my research to industry trade groups and at academic, peer-reviewed conferences. These groups and conferences brought opportunities to exchange ideas with a wide variety of stakeholders and provided insights for further curriculum development.

In the year to come I will be linking the past year's activities back to the classroom, both at the Lazaridis School and across Canada.

MEMBER OF THE JURY FOR CANADA'S NEXT TOP AD EXEC COMPETITION

Background: Since 2006, McMaster University has presented Canada's Next Top Ad Exec, (www.topadexec.com), an influential marketing and advertising competition reaching over 40 business schools from across Canada and more than 150 student teams each year. The competition offers student teams the opportunity to "solve" a real-world business problem presented by a major organization. This year's sponsor was Microsoft, and the case was to promote its artificial intelligence (AI) platform, Azure, to targeted users who include university students.

My Activity: In 2018, I was invited to participate as a juror for the 2019 competition, which involved previewing the brief and then reading and assessing two phases of submissions from student teams. The first phase winnowed the initial number of teams and the second phase involved selecting finalists for the third and final round of competition. Both phases required jurors to provide detailed feedback to each team about their submission.

Participating as a juror in the competition was an eye-opener. Although all of the submissions were anonymized (i.e. I could not see from which university a team was from), I was confident that none of the submissions I was assigned were from Laurier (not only because of my affiliation, but because one component of the brief asked for promotional plans for launching Azure in specific regions or schools, and none of those I received named Laurier or Waterloo. Presumably, students would see their own institution as an ideal context for promotion).



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Result: The range of work I reviewed was both broad and instructive. It was clear that there was a wide variance in the instructional content of marketing and advertising curriculum across institutions. This could be seen in the students' ability to respond to the brief; the resulting pitches, which provided a top-line assessment of key issues and a proposal for a marketing plan (round one); the more detailed plans, which included customer research and analysis; and the promotional plans and budgets, among other deliverables (round two).



The students had clearly come from programs that emphasized different aspects of marketing practice. Some teams excelled at conducting and analyzing research; others provided thorough and detailed media planning, while still others offered concepts which revealed real insight and creativity. Very few teams were strong in all areas, suggesting that individual institutions' interest and instructional capabilities in advertising tend to focus on specific aspects and are not as comprehensive as, for example, the education provided by colleges.

The caveat, of course, is that teams self-select based on their interest and confidence in

Top: Laurier BBA student Ricky Liu placed in the top 10 finalists of the Canada's Next Top Ad Exec Competition. See page six for his story!

competing in this topic area and individual universities provide varying levels of support for competitions (including faculty coaches), so it is difficult to know if the submissions I saw are truly representative of university-based brand communication education.

Bottom: Top ten finalists group picture.

Going forward, I will encourage the Lazaridis School to more actively field teams to this competition. One major impediment to participation is the structure of the Lazaridis School's Bachelor of Business Administration program, which does not provide students with the opportunity to take electives before their fourth year. Not only are many of our students engaged in the co-op program (meaning that they are working every other semester), but given that the competition runs in the winter semester, many of the students may be more focused on securing job offers than in participating in competitions during their final term.

EXTERNAL REVIEWER OF INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQAP) FOR OCAD UNIVERSITY'S ADVERTISING PROGRAM

Background: In last year's accountability report to **MCET**, I described participating in an external examination of Humber College's Bachelor of Creative Advertising program for the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). This year, my familiarity with postsecondary advertising education was broadened to include the Advertising Program at OCAD University.

Unlike the PEQAB assessment at Humber, which was a periodic review of the degree and its adherence to its stated curriculum, learning goals and outcomes, etc., the exercise at OCAD was an institutional (internal) quality assessment, as mandated by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.

My Activity: In addition to reading and review of an extensive self-study portfolio/report, I spent two days onsite at OCAD with my fellow (internal) reviewer, Nick Puckett (faculty member and director of the Digital Futures program at OCAD), meeting deans, faculty and students as well as taking a tour of the program's resources (e.g. classrooms, studios, library).

I then submitted a detailed review assessment report which was provided to the Advertising program's (then) chair, Sandra Kedey, as well as the VP academic and provost, dean of the Design School and the university's quality assurance office.

It was instructive to see how the former college had adapted its program as a university. As is often the case in colleges, OCAD faculty is largely composed of working (or at least experienced) practitioners and therefore, the curriculum prioritizes (to me, enviable) technical skill development and studio time. It was also, however, working to offer more theory-based instruction.

Result: I believe that the review was useful to OCAD's leadership and will be used to improve its Advertising program. Sandra Kedey sent me a note of thanks after receiving the reviewers' report (see sidebar).

One of the additional benefits of conducting program audits such as this one has been to "bridge" institutions and colleagues that might not otherwise have exposure to one another. For example, a conversation with faculty member Nick Gosso during the OCAD review prompted me to consider creating an event (meeting, panel and/or symposium) for students, practitioners and faculty focusing on ethics in advertising. Relevant topics could include privacy; "truthiness" in media; communication and representation in a time of "___ Lives Matter" and the #MeToo era; and new frontiers for branding, such as the legalization

Hello Dr. Wilner,

I wanted to personally thank you for your report for our Advertising program.

Our tasks ahead are to reflect and respond accordingly to yours and Nick's recommendations. As IQAP leader and soon to be stepping down chair of the program, I am delighted to read such a report and sincerely appreciate all of your time and effort taken with this. We know we have holes, and lots to fix, but your validation in so many areas has made me very, very proud of a program I have so much heart for.

I just wanted to say that to you. Thank you so much for this. It's exactly what we need.

Sandra Kedey

(former chair,
Advertising program,
OCAD University)

of cannabis. Both Sandra Kedey and Nick Gosso thought this was a worthy idea and I plan to work on developing it further in the year to come.

Like my participation as a juror in Canada's Next Top Ad Exec competition, I took from this deep review an ever-expanding appreciation for the myriad approaches to brand communication education. The more studio-based approach fosters students with better technical skills than typical business school classroom-based instruction, but that can sometimes come at the expense of more strategic analysis and insight.

While colleges have traditionally been viewed as sites to acquire technical skills and universities have been seen as more theory-based, the state of education in areas like advertising and brand management is increasingly blurring as colleges change into universities (e.g. OCAD, Ryerson) and colleges develop degree programs (Humber, George Brown – see next section). These changes bring to the fore issues of educational objective, such as the balance between knowledge acquisition and employment, as well as the trade offs—relevant instructor background, physical resources and equipment, classroom and studio hours allocated to different types of skill development—required to achieve them.

CHAIR, REVIEW PANEL OF AN APPLICATION FROM GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE TO OFFER AN HONOURS BACHELOR OF BRAND STUDIES PROGRAM

The second review I participated in this year was to chair a panel assessing a proposed degree program at George Brown College: an Honours Bachelor of Design with a specialization in brand studies.

This role, under the auspices of PEQAB, was even more intensive than the review at Humber College, because rather than a periodic review, the objective for this task was to determine whether or not George Brown College could offer the degree and, if so, to determine any issues that might need to be addressed.

Careful assessment of the 640-page (!) program proposal document—which included a review of each course and its proposed syllabus—was followed by a full-day site visit and discussions with a wide range of relevant stakeholders.

The outcome is still pending, as my (and my fellow panelist from York University's) recommendations were extensive, and the College must now decide how to address them.

Assessing a proposed program as opposed to something already being offered posed new challenges. While I cannot provide specific detail while the program is still under review, it is interesting to note the College's assessment of branding, and more specifically, brand design, as a relevant and viable subject in which to locate what is only its second honours degree program in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Information Technology (and furthermore, not to locate it in its Faculty of Business).



George Brown College

BRAND-RELEVANT RESEARCH

I have several active areas of research relevant to brand communication and management. One of them is brand design and the influence of design thinking in organizations. Another is related to the emergence of the new legal cannabis market in the U.S. and Canada, and how legitimation and adoption are influenced by product development and brand elements. Over the past year, I have been working on this research program, including presenting preliminary findings at scholarly conferences and industry-based events:

- In **August 2018** I attended the Academy of Management conference in Chicago to present a paper on conceptualizations of design thinking and its objectives.
- In **January 2019** I was invited to present preliminary findings of a study of recreational cannabis adoption in the U.S. to representatives from consumer packaged goods companies and their agencies at the Food & Consumer Products of Canada “Cannabis + CPG” event.
- In **March 2019** I presented preliminary theoretical development of the cannabis research to marketing faculty at the KEDGE Business School in Marseille, France.
- In **April 2019** I was invited to present related findings on the cannabis industry focused on the role of packaging and brand identity at the O’Cannabiz conference in Toronto. One interesting outcome of this presentation was a meeting with Paul Lockhard, president of the agency Colour’s Toronto office. Colour was, until recently, the agency of record (AOR) for Aurora Cannabis. Paul and I had an excellent meeting and conversation about how academic research methods could improve insight research in advertising, and agreed to speak again in the future.
- In **May 2019** I attended the Dieline conference in Chicago (partnered with the HOW Design conference) to develop more knowledge about packaging’s role in brand identity. Among other results, after attending several brands’ presentations, I connected with the executive creative director for Taco Bell and we are discussing the development of a case study about the use of design to develop the Taco Bell brand both publicly and within the Yum! Brands organization. I also spoke with Andrew Gibbs, founder of the Dieline, about partnering with him to develop curriculum related to brand packaging and design. Currently, the Dieline partners with



Laurier student in the top 10 finalists for Canada’s Next Top Ad Exec competition

Laurier Bachelor of Business Administration student Ricky Liu and his teammate Lily Liu, an Accounting and Finance student from the University of Waterloo, won \$1,000 for their pitch and had the opportunity to present to more than 20 senior leaders, including CEOs and CMOs, in Toronto on April 1, 2019.

“There was about 400 years of experience just sitting in front of us,” says Ricky. “It was a very scary moment, for sure, but, after you’ve done something like that, you’ll never be afraid of presenting again. It was a really great experience.”

Working from the case challenge to market Microsoft’s AI technology, Liu and Liu drew on their own personal experiences, and research among other students, to develop a pitch for using AI for cross-cultural communication.

To learn more about their pitch, and the competition, please go to <https://bit.ly/2jzswGB>.

New York's School of Visual Arts and its Masters in Branding program. Both of these connections will be further developed in the year to come.

- In **June 2019** I presented findings on the cannabis research at the Academy for Design Innovation Management at Loughborough University, London.

BRIEFLY

- I regret to report that the Nielsen Case Competition, featuring collaboration with General Mills, has been discontinued by Nielsen citing the need to direct their resources to employee recruitment instead.
- I had a productive meeting with Bruce McDonald, CEO of Imagine Canada, on possibly underwriting research at the Lazaridis School on developing brand recognition for Canada's charities.

THANK YOU

I want to offer my sincere thanks to **MCET** for supporting the Chair in Brand Communication at the Lazaridis School of Business & Economics. With your support, I am able to connect with a wide range of industry and academic partners, improve the state of branding education and practice in Canada, and contribute research that is useful in both academic and industry contexts. I look forward to continuing the work we are doing in the year to come as I bring my experiences from this year back to the classroom at the Lazaridis School.

Respectfully submitted by,

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