

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alexandra Rumpakis for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in  
Marketing presented on May 28, 2015. Title:

The “Re-Beav” Branding:  
An examination of the process and outcomes of the Oregon State Athletics  
Rebrand

Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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The culture of brands and branding is ever-changing and evolving. Brands are becoming increasingly important in today’s society, yet they are harder to differentiate. As a result of this growing importance and competition, it is difficult to attain a strong brand presence among competitors and achieve a distinct identity with consumers. Therefore it is vital for companies and corporations to develop a brand that is strong, differentiated and competitive.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the importance of branding and rebranding within a Division-1 university athletics department and how it contributes to a national brand identity. It discusses what branding and re-branding is, and why it is important to establish a strong brand culture and identity. It utilizes Oregon State University as a case study to examine the process and outcomes of re-branding in a Division-1 university athletic department.

Key Words: Branding, rebranding, university athletics, brand identity, brand recognition, Division-1 University, Oregon State University, case study, motivation, process, outcomes.

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## Acknowledgements

There are so many people to acknowledge for their unwavering support throughout my thesis research and writing process. I would like to thank Colleen Bee for her mentorship, support, and guidance. She never failed to point me in the right direction when I didn't know where to go next. I would also like to recognize my family for always being my biggest fans and encouraging me throughout this four-year endeavor. Lastly, thank you to my close friends and Kappa Alpha Theta sorority sisters for being some of the most supportive and caring people in my life. Go Beavs!

The “Re-Beav” Branding:  
An examination of the process and outcomes of the Oregon State University  
Athletics Rebrand

By

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A PROJECT

submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the  
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Marketing  
(Honors Scholar)

Presented May 28, 2015  
Commencement June 2015

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Marketing project of Alexandra Rumpakis  
presented on May 28, 2015.

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# **The “Re-Beav” Branding: An examination of the process and outcomes of the Oregon State Athletics Rebrand**

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The culture of brands and branding is ever-changing and evolving. Brands are becoming increasingly important in today’s society, yet they are harder to differentiate. As a result of this growing importance and competition, it is difficult to attain a strong presence among competitors and clear identity with consumers. Therefore it is vital for companies and corporations to develop a brand presence that is strong, differentiated and competitive. Johnson (2006) reports how a saturated market makes it crucial for brands to continually be updating and competing on a creative scale among their competitors:

"All of this marketing saturation that's going on is creating this kind of arms race between marketers where they have to up the ante the next time out because their competitors have upped the ante the last time they were out," Walker-Smith said. "And the only way you can win is to have more saturation -- be more creative; be more outrageous." (Johnson, 2006, p. 1)

Consumers are exposed to an extraordinary number of messages and advertisements, some estimates suggest that consumers see up to 5,000 ad messages a day (Story, 2007). As a result, brands are forced to constantly innovate to be the top of mind brand for consumers. If the key attributes of the brand get lost, become outdated, or no longer connect with the audience the company or organization is trying to attract, a rebranding is a demanding, yet

beneficial option for brands. Although rebranding can be a time consuming and possible risky process, it proves worthwhile for many in the long run.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the process of a rebrand, specifically within the realm of a Division-1 University Athletic Department. This examination of the rebrand that was introduced at Oregon State University in Spring 2013 provides an in-depth look at the process and outcomes of a rebrand and the motivation behind the Oregon State Athletic Department's rebrand.



## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Branding consists of “the development and maintenance of sets of product attributes and values which are coherent, appropriate, distinctive, protectable and appealing to consumers” (Murphy, 1987, p. 3). A brand is an external image communicated by a company or organization that is perceived by consumers. If a brand feels the need to change its identity or external image perceived by others, a rebrand may be considered. A rebrand can be conceptualized as a “change in an organization’s self identity and/or an attempt to change perceptions of the image among external stakeholders” (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006 p. 820). Rebranding has become an increasingly popular phenomenon within the last decade as competitive markets and consumer perceptions continue to evolve (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2003).

The following chapter describes the characteristics of both branding and rebranding and the importance of each. It takes into account why companies and corporations participate in the branding and rebranding processes and how to determine the success of each. Through an examination of the concepts of branding and rebranding we will be able to gain a more thorough and complete understanding of the influence and impact both can have on companies and consumers.

### BRANDING

Branding is a very broad term that can be constructed and defined in a variety of ways. Therefore, it is important to understand and clearly outline what branding is in order to be successful in recognizing its influence. Branding is how

a company, product name, or image, takes on certain characteristics and values in representing an over-arching company or corporation (Vaid, 2003).

A brand is not only a logo nor is it just a product, a brand is a consumer's gut feeling about a product, service or company. Each person has his or her own perception of a brand (Neumeier, 2003). It is about making an emotional connection to consumers. A brand stands for something, adopts values, and demonstrates them to the public. A brand is not created overnight; it is a development of a set of attributes that company can build upon and that can be used to set it apart from competitors and create distinctiveness among consumers. This set of attributes "are those descriptive features that characterize a product or service – what a consumer thinks the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumption" (Keller, 1993, p. 4)

Many of the most recognizable and distinctive brands in the world are those that are charismatic and relate to their consumers. A charismatic brand is defined as "any product, service, or company for which people believe there's no substitute" (Neumeier, 2003). Brands such as Coca-Cola, Apple, Nike, and Disney have clearly defined themselves as charismatic brands. They stand for things that people strive for, such as joy, intelligence, success, and imagination. Some of the top global brands, according to Forbes 2014 ranking are Apple, Google and Coca-Cola.

Branding is an essential part of any corporation, company or institution's presence. The purpose of creating a brand is to share a consistent theme aimed at initiating and retaining a recognizable identity and customer loyalty. The foundation of a brand is trust among consumers, and is established only when

experiences of the consumers have either met or exceeded their expectations (Neumeier, 2003). Branding includes many different aspects of a brand, such as brand identity, brand personality, and the process of branding, which are described below.

## BRAND IDENTITY

Brand identity is the backbone of a company. It is the soul of the corporation, the sum of all its part, its goals, attitudes, values and culture (Murphy, 1987). It is the things we as consumers can see, touch, hear, smell, and unveil with our senses. Brand identities are most effective when they differentiate themselves from competitors and are easily recognizable among an array of consumers. Brand identity is the constant reminder of the meaning of the brand and is what is directly communicated to consumers (Wheeler, 2003).

A logo is a significant part of a brand and is one of the most common ways for a brand to be identified. Logos are a significant and immediate part of a brand identity – a visual expression of a brand that gains an instant, distinctive presence that can separate the brand from competitors (Vaid, 2003). It is a visual identity that directly resonates with consumers and triggers perceptions and unlocks associations with the brand (Wheeler, 2003).

Shape, color and content all play a vital role in establishing a distinguished brand identity. Wheeler (2003) indicates that the “brain acknowledges and remembers shapes first” and that “since a distinctive shape makes a faster imprint on memory, the importance of designing a distinctive shape is imperative in identity design.” After shape, color is the most recognizable visual a consumer

can come into contact with (Wheeler, 2003). Color can evoke emotion and brand association. For example, red is most commonly and recognizably associated with Coca-Cola, while Tiffany and Co. is recognized by their signature robin's egg blue. Once shape and color have been identified, content is the last concept that processes the language and substance behind a logo (Wheeler, 2003).

Companies who are able to clearly define their values, culture and heritage within a brand or rebrand are able to reap the benefits of the promotion of their desired perceptions to their consumers. Important criteria of a brand identity are identified as bold, memorable and appropriate, immediately recognizable, provide a clear and consistent image of the company, communicate the company's persona, and have enduring value (Wheeler, 2003). A successful brand identity will clearly embody these criteria and contribute to the success of the company.

## BRAND PERSONALITY

Brand personality encompasses a set of human characteristics that we as consumers place and associate with a brand. These characteristics then create expectations about key performance attributes and benefits of the brand consumers then acquire (Solomon, 2015). When considering brand personality, consumers purchase due to one of three reasons: to fit or match their personality, to bolster their personality, or to modify their personality (Solomon, 2015). Brand personality "concentrates on what the brand says about the customer, and how the customer feels about that" (Vaid, 2003).

Image congruity, the theory that consumers select products and brands that correspond to their self-image, is also important in understanding branding and brand personality. People tend to define themselves in part by the possessions they hold. For example, Mercedes is a well-known car brand around the world. Consumers purchase Mercedes cars not only because of its performance features and function, but also because consumers pay to adopt the brand's personality and the perceived status and lifestyle the brand represents (Vaid, 2003). Brands play a significant role in the definition of the self and the extended self (Solomon, 2015).

Consumers depend on shared meanings of culture and society, and depict their own self-concept based on these meanings. This takes place in the form of symbolic interactionism, and relies heavily on the concept of brands and branding to help identify a self-concept (Solomon, 2015). Brands can serve as a means of communication, conveying values, attributes and meaning. When we associate with brands, we are communicating to others that we believe in and express those same values.

## BRAND BUILDING

Neumeier (2003) outlines the five disciplines in building a brand and how to be successful in branding. These are identified as: differentiate, collaborate, innovate, validate and cultivate. First, one must begin by asking three main questions before building a brand, "Who are you?" "What do you do?" and, "Why does it matter?" The first and foremost step in answering these questions begins when a company can differentiate itself and its brand from competitors and stand

out to consumers. The human brain is designed and wired to notice what's different from the norm, to notice contrast and then to make meaning from it (Neumeier, 2003). Branding in modern society has developed and evolved into evoking consumer emotion and feeling in addition to an emphasis on brand benefits and features.

After a brand clearly defines a differentiating feature, collaboration among the company and its consumers is vital in continuing the success and development of the brand. Consumers determine how the brand identifies itself and fits into the market. If consumers do not support the brand, success is not as easily achieved. A brand must also be innovative, creative and striking. An idea is innovative when it is daring and strays away from the norm of what has already been set into place (Neumeier, 2003). It must be distinctive in nature and create commotion to gain initial awareness. A brand then needs to validate itself through repetitive communication. Feedback, research, and measuring brand distinctiveness, memorability and relevance are all important tactics to discover the validity of a brand. Lastly, a brand must cultivate itself into a reliable entity. Branding is always evolving, and with that, credibility of a brand and the trust placed into it by consumers must stay consistent. In retaining loyalty among consumers and staying true to core values, a brand can grow towards a more sustainable competitive advantage (Neumeier, 2003).

## REBRANDING

Rebranding is a special occurrence that takes place when a brand feels the need to update, change, or modify its current brand identity. Most commonly, a

rebranding occurs because a company believes that their current appearance is misunderstood in the market place. When a company undergoes a rebrand, it is of “vital importance... to redefine themselves around a new set of objectives” (Vaid, 2003).

## PROCESS

Rebranding can be a lengthy, time consuming, and expensive process. However if a company is willing to undergo the stress and workings of the rebranding process to modify their brand identity, it may be worth the initial risk. The main drivers for rebranding, as stated by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) are decisions or events “causing a change in a company’s structure, strategy or performance of sufficient magnitude to suggest the need for a fundamental redefinition of its identity.”

## WHY REBRAND?

Companies decide to rebrand and modify their brand identity for a variety of reasons. Luck (2012), highlights what she believes are the main reasons behind rebranding. There may be a highly competitive landscape that dictates necessary added differentiation. There may be the threat of a brand becoming irrelevant or outdated. Or, a new offering from the company may be forthcoming. In all three instances, she states that without exception, a rebranding should be strategic, authentic to the company’s culture and values, consistent with target consumers, clear and defined, focused on providing differentiation yet flexible enough to retain brand equity (Luck, 2012). Motivation for a rebrand can also stem from a desire for a company to send a clear signal to their consumers, competitors, and

the marketplace that they have made a significant change for the better (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Stuart and Muzellec (2004) believe there are a variety of reasons companies take on rebranding. Old names, logos and slogans may become inappropriate if a merger, acquisition or divestiture occurs which then may induce a rebranding. Shifts in the marketplace caused by competitors, new competitors, or changed economic or legal conditions may also place additional pressure on companies to rebrand. Internally, a company may want to create a global image, update an outdated brand, or communicate a new vision or focus for the company to the marketplace and their consumers (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Although rebranding can feel like a shot in the dark or a risky change, it can be a powerful tool to restructure an organization's image and alter consumer perceptions. A rebrand can be applied appropriately when a company realizes its actions are not consistent with its values, or when the company feels isolated from its consumers and needs to reevaluate its message in the marketplace (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Rebranding can be advantageous in a variety of aspects. If done well, it can be an asset for the company undergoing the change. It can unify a company or brand that may have previously been on the edge of disparity. A rebrand has the potential to inspire employees within the organization. Such drastic change can stimulate enthusiasm and innovation, or increase productivity for the company. Finally, a rebrand can elicit respect of the organization from others. Consumers respect brands that are confident in their values. An organization's rebrand can represent a shift to a more serious and



confident presentation of their products or services, and their relationship to their consumers. Ultimately, consumers feel good and stay loyal to brands that make them feel good about themselves (Viswanathan, 2015).

## OUTCOMES

As previously stated, when a rebranding effort takes place, a negative initial response to the rebrand is not uncommon. However, it does not signify failure. If and when a rebrand is successful, one is able to understand what is distinctive about the brand and can continue to build upon that understanding as time goes on, ultimately increasing brand awareness (Frankfort & Berfield, 2013). For example, colleges and universities across the United States rely heavily on alumni donations as a means of financial support. A strong college or university brand is a more attractive and engaging option for alumni donors to support than one that is lackluster and outdated. In order to engage alumni and encourage them to participate in donations, Stephenson (2014, p. 184) believes that “branding in higher education should be situated in a context of honoring nostalgia while attracting new members to most effectively compete in the college marketplace.” She further states that the perceptions of the university by alumni play a large role in marketing and communication strategies. Brand management should include a message that conveys a “consistent, distinctive, and attractive product to university stakeholders of the past, present, and future” (Stephenson, 2014). As demonstrated by the alumni donations example, major outcomes of a successful rebranding include a better understanding of consumer perceptions, greater brand awareness, as well as financial gains.

Every company, corporation, and organization that competes in the marketplace strives to be the best among their competition. A rebrand, although a risky, often grueling, and time-consuming process, can reap many benefits (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Through careful planning and preparation, persistence and patience throughout the process, a rebranding can be extremely successful. This then can make a stronger brand identity, increase brand equity, alter a brand's personality in a positive manner, and signify a brand's core values and fundamentals to their competitors and consumers. All of these components contribute to a stronger overall brand, and a stronger brand is the gateway to a more successful brand.

## OBSTACLES

There is no doubt that branding is one of the most important aspects of a company. Changing the brand is a risky process that although has great potential to be successful, is also susceptible to failure. Stuart and Muzellec (2004) identify four questions companies should ask themselves before they allow themselves to commence a rebrand:

1. What will happen if the change isn't made?
2. What is being signaled?
3. Are consumers aware and positive about the change?
4. How will competitors react to the change? Or is the rebrand in response to competitor changes in rebranding?

The first question analyzes the justification for the rebrand. If significant change dependent on the objectives of the rebrand does not occur, then the worth

of the rebrand may be questioned. It is wise to assess the fundamentals of the organization or company to determine if the change will be effective. The second question is identifying where from the rebranding effort is stemming. A CEO can make the decision to rebrand with the flip of a switch. However, it is wise to examine if the change is driven by internal and external factors that effect the company and brand as a whole. Determining whether the change in branding is fundamental and significant, or is simply for glamour and show, is vital. The third question takes into account consumer perception. Key consumers and stakeholders are those who are not only loyal to the brand, but who have purchasing power and legitimacy. It is important to identify those consumers, as change is often “only weakly supported and often violently opposed” (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Lastly, the fourth question addresses the role of competitors in the marketplace. While rebranding is an important concept and process, a company should not lose sight of their other roles and responsibilities. With the increased attention given to a rebrand, an organization’s competitors may be gaining advantage in consumer relationships, marketing fundamentals, and increase in profit (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Another issue to be aware of is that a rebrand can greatly alter consumer perception. This is what some companies may be striving for, however they must take into consideration if and how it will affect their current loyal consumers. Frankfort and Berfield from *Bloomberg Businessweek* discuss that it is a “fatal mistake to believe you can leave your customers behind and find new ones” (Frankfort & Berfield, 2013). Companies that are rebranding must take into

account the effect the change will have on their consumers, and if that change will positively or negatively alter the firm's success.

It can be difficult for consumers to adapt to and adopt new or modified brand identities. A transformation however still needs to maintain the same brand values that were instilled in the original brand. A company undergoing a rebrand must understand their consumer, what motivates them, and anticipate how they will react to the rebrand. It is a grave mistake to assume that gaining new consumers rather than retaining old ones is an easier feat (Frankfort & Berfield, 2013).

Companies need to be cautious when developing a rebrand. It is easy to assume a loyal consumer base will follow the company in any direction it chooses to go. However, a new brand identity, image or perceived personality is “potentially threatening to heartfelt brands”, or those that have developed a following of the likes of a cult brand. Because people associate themselves so closely with such brands, and typically become one with the lifestyle and culture of the brand, “any change that tampers with the brand could weaken it and ripple out among consumers” (Vaid, 2003).

## CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY METHOD

### DEFINITION

Case studies are used as a research strategy throughout a variety of fields of both academia and business. A “case” is defined as a specific entity such as a person, organization, event, or social phenomenon. Case studies are most appropriate in the investigation of events or phenomena in which a descriptive question (What has happened?) or an explanatory question (How or why did something happen?) is asked (Yin, 2014). The “case” in the current research is Oregon State University Department of Athletics and the research addresses the question of why and how OSU athletics engaged in a major rebranding effort. The current case study research is focused on a single organization (i.e., OSU) and data are collected from multiple units (i.e., Department of Athletics employees and OSU students). This design would best be described as an embedded, single-case study (Yin, 1984).

Case studies offer researchers the ability to develop an up-close and in-depth understanding of a case (Yin, 2014). Yin further outlines three ideas that he believes embody a case study:

1. Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context:  
when
2. The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly  
evident; and in which
3. Multiple (not singular) sources of evidence are used

Consistent with this idea, Schnell (1992) suggests that at least two sources of data are used in most case studies including interviews, observation, and administrative or publicly available documents.

## MOTIVATION

Published case studies become examples for future research and shape conceptions of the way research can and should be conducted (Piekkari, 2010). Case studies are all inclusive and detailed, and they can utilize many different research techniques. They are unique in the fact that they tell a story about a research question or theory. Data collected for a case study is contextual, meaning that it is relative to a certain market or industry. Researchers use qualitative data within case studies, however are not limited to it. Histories and stories given to the reader are a distinctive quality about case studies that enhance its appeal (Yin, 2014).

Ultimately, case studies are chosen as a research method because of the nature of the research problem or research question. Case studies are best when examining real-life situations, contexts, or issues. They are able to investigate and measure social units that contain multiple variables. Case studies are widely used across various sectors of work including education, social work, administration, and health. In many instances, case studies are valued because they can raise understanding that then leads to improved practices (Merriam, 2009). Case study outputs are used to determine if meaningful patterns are emerging from the data or information studied for the researcher to analyze (Yin, 2014).

## OSU REBRANDING CASE STUDY

Examining a rebranding effort put forth by a company or organization can be a somewhat difficult task in regards to what exact elements should be examined. Each rebranding process is unique to the company or organization undergoing the change, and the objectives of each can be very different. No matter the motivation or reasons for a change, rebranding is an increasingly common phenomenon that deserves thorough inspection and understanding. In a chronologically sequenced case study, such as this, events are allowed to be traced over time, relevant questions such as “how” and “why” are asked, and specific indicators of the study are identified prior to data collection and are then traced over time (Yin, 2014).

The following information focuses on an examination of Oregon State University, specifically the rebranding revealed in the Spring of 2013 by the OSU Department of Athletics. In using OSU’s rebranding efforts as a case study, we were able to reflect on the process of the rebrand, explore motivations, and examine the impact on the Oregon State community, the fans, the students, and to the school.

The author collected data from a multiple sources including publicly available documents (i.e., newspaper, video, photographs, and other written and visual paper and electronic documents) and interviews with current Oregon State University students and OSU Department of Athletics staff. Written documents can provide “clues to understanding the culture of organizations” and are a concrete form of information regarding Oregon State’s specific circumstance in the rebrand (Simons 2009). Documents obtained included articles from various

newspaper and website sources that regularly report on Oregon State athletic updates (e.g., The Oregonian, ESPN).

Interviews can serve four main purposes: to document the interviewee's perspective on a topic, to promote learning for the interviewer in identifying or analyzing issues, to probe a topic or deepen a response and to engage in dialogue, and lastly, to potentially uncover unobserved feelings of the interviewee (Simons, 2009). Interviews were conducted with current OSU students and OSU Department of Athletics staff involved in the rebranding process (see Appendix for Interview Guides). Interviews varied in length from 15 to 40 minutes. Both documents and interviews aided in the examination of the Oregon State rebrand.

Prior to conducting interviews with OSU students and Oregon State Athletics staff, OSU IRB approval was obtained. All interviews were conducted and with permission from respondents were audio recorded and then transcribed. Interview questions for both OSU students and Department of Athletics staff can be found in the Appendix.

Data collected through publicly available documents and student and staff interviews were organized around topics based on previous branding and rebranding research. Systematic coding was used to identify these a priori topics based on previous research and to also consider any emerging ideas or concepts. The resulting findings and themes are discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### INTRODUCTION TO OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Oregon State University has a tradition-rich history as the first institution of higher education established in the state of Oregon. OSU was established in 1868 on August 22<sup>nd</sup> as Corvallis College, originally designated as the Agricultural College of the State of Oregon. Six years earlier, President Abraham Lincoln signed the First Morrill Act, which offered every state public land grants to support colleges of agriculture and mechanic arts (Beach, Nielsen, & Landis, 2004). OSU would become one of the first three land grant universities in the nation at the time of its founding alongside the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and University of California at Berkley.

The first intercollegiate athletic event held by the college was a baseball game played against Monmouth Christian College in Monmouth, Oregon in 1883. The Athletic Department and the school's football program were established ten years later in 1893. Oregon State University is currently one of twelve universities that participate in the Pacific-12 Conference. Oregon State University, along with the University of California at Berkeley, University of Washington, and University of Oregon, was one of the founding members of the Pacific-12 Conference, originally known as the Pacific Coast Conference, in 1916 (Gall, 2012). Oregon State currently participates in seven men sports and ten women sports sponsored by the PAC-12 .

## HISTORY

The OSU Alumni Association, through a twenty part series of Oregon State's sports history, has provided the following information on the history of the OSU mascot and athletic logo (Landis & Edmonston, 2012).

Before the formal presence of a mascot at Oregon State University, John Richard Newton Bell, was known as the "Human Mascot" from 1893-1928. A Corvallis resident and Presbyterian minister, Bell became an avid athletic supporter following the introduction of football at Oregon State. He was written about and pictured in many of the early school yearbooks as J.R.N. Bell, the official Oregon State "mascot." In honor of his passion and dedication to OSU athletics, the former football field known as "The College Field" was renamed "Bell Field", which stood where Dixon Student Recreational Center stands now, until 1951.

1893 was the first year that a mascot was identified with Oregon State and Oregon State athletics. At the time, Oregon State was known as State Agricultural College or S.A.C. As stated by the OSU Alumni Association Sports History series, the school colors were "probably navy and white", and the mascot was "Jimmie the Coyote." One year later, orange was selected as the official school color on May 2, 1893 and students soon adopted black as the background color choice (Beach, Nielsen, & Landis, 2004). Although the exact date is disputed, Oregon State University was first referred to as the "Beavers" sometime between 1910 and 1916. At this time, the name of the university had changed from S.A.C. to Oregon Agricultural College. Although OSU was referred to as the "Beavers", the mascot from 1906-1910 was a bulldog. As the companion of OSU Athletic

Director James Arbuthnot, the bulldog was the “unofficial” mascot of some athletic teams, specifically football and wrestling.

The second reference to a Beaver as the school mascot came in 1921. While canoeing Mary’s River, students brought to campus a six-month old, half-starved beaver to be nursed back to good health. The name “Beavo” for the baby beaver stuck, although questions remain as to how long Beavo was the mascot, or if it even was at all. There is suspicion as to whether Beavo was an attempt to replace J.R.N. Bell as the school mascot to support the recent practice of referring to the school athletic teams as “Beavers”.

The idea of a beaver as the mascot started to stick, and in 1935 the cover of the December issue of the Oregon State alumni magazine featured a photo of a live beaver under the care of the OSU Wildlife Club named “Billy”. Copy underneath the photo clearly identified “Billy” as the new beaver mascot. His cartoon-like appearance was then published in various news publications, most notably the Barometer, in the early 1930s and 1940s.

1942 was the earliest reference Oregon State had to what we now know as “Benny Beaver”. However, the name “Benny” did not come to be until 1952 when Oregon State University was still Oregon State College. Ken Austin, a student trying out for the rally squad, came up with the idea for the mascot name. Bill Sundstrom, the leader of the rally squad and Austin’s fraternity brother, suggested Ken become the school mascot. Not knowing what exactly a mascot was, Austin set off to make his own Beaver costume from scratch. He bought the head of a costume at a local costume shop and covered it with shag rug, used a

large piece of sponge rubber for a beaver tail, and donned football pants and a jersey to complete the mascot's look (Huber, 2013).



Ken Austin as Benny



Ken Austin with Benny

Pictures: <http://poweredbyorange.com/2013/04/30/the-first-benny-beaver/>

The “Vintage Benny” we know today, the mascot of the grinning beaver head with the OSU beanie was the official OSU logo for most of “Benny’s” life. Arthur Evans, a graphic artist for Angeles Pacific, created the cartoon sometime around 1951. Evans was a popular cartoon artist and created college mascot characters for many universities and colleges. When trying to register Benny as an OSU trademark, Candace Hayes, Oregon State’s Trademark and Licensing Coordinator, found that OSU was not the only school with the same beaver cartoon mascot. The California Institute of Technology’s mascot was the exact same beaver cartoon, the only difference was in the letters on the beanie.



Vintage OSU Benny (1973-1996)



CIT's logo

Benny: [http://wpmu.library.oregonstate.edu/osu\\_archives/2013/09/24/benny-the-beaver-visits-scarc-and-transforms-into-benny-the-researcher/](http://wpmu.library.oregonstate.edu/osu_archives/2013/09/24/benny-the-beaver-visits-scarc-and-transforms-into-benny-the-researcher/)

CIT: [http://www.yelp.com/biz\\_photos/california-institute-of-technology-pasadena?select=tBbRgpn1aCvopK3mos1bqQ&userid=Eg3eJaM3JhVgeqzjMBJnUg#tBbRgpn1aCvopK3mos1bqQ](http://www.yelp.com/biz_photos/california-institute-of-technology-pasadena?select=tBbRgpn1aCvopK3mos1bqQ&userid=Eg3eJaM3JhVgeqzjMBJnUg#tBbRgpn1aCvopK3mos1bqQ)

After the adoption of “Benny Beaver” as the official mascot of Oregon State, a Benny counterpart was introduced in the early 1980’s. “Bernice”, a female beaver mascot, accompanied Benny to most athletic events. In her time, Bernice gave Oregon State the only male and female mascots in NCAA history. As a tradition, Bernice wore a wedding dress to every Homecoming celebration alongside Benny in a tuxedo. Bernice continued until the 1990s, appearing with Benny for fifteen years.

In 1999, Oregon State underwent a logo change, replacing the kinder, gentler, grinning “Vintage Benny” with what was referred to as the “Angry” Beaver or “Angry Benny”. Despite the change of image, the “Benny” name has remained throughout generations. For most alumni, fans and friends of OSU, the “Angry Beaver” was a way of differentiating the new and old logos rather than as a new name representation.



“Angry Beaver” (1999)

Picture: <http://communications.oregonstate.edu/trademark-licensing/about/design-guidelines/college-vault>

Oregon State introduced an interlocking “OS” by Michael Morrow, a lifelong Beaver fan and owner of Morrow Creative Group, in April of 2007 (Miller, 2007). The interlocking “OS” was created as a secondary logo to complement the primary “Angry Beaver” athletic symbol featured on the Reser Stadium field, Gill Coliseum court, and athletics materials. The new logo was created to establish a unique appearance for Oregon State that could be easily identifiable nationwide. Bob De Carolis, the OSU Director of Athletics, felt the “new branding effort will enable us to create a common identity and will set us apart from other schools that have similar color schemes and abbreviations” (“Oregon State Unveils New OS Logo and Brand Identity”, 2007). The interlocking “OS” was a hopeful design to separate Oregon State from other institutions across the nation that feature a block “O” or “OSU”, such as Oklahoma State, who also have similar black and orange school colors. (“Oregon State Unveils New OS Logo and Brand Identity”, 2007).



“Interlocking “OS” (2007)

Picture: <http://communications.oregonstate.edu/trademark-licensing/about/design-guidelines/college-vault>

Consumers and fans do not adapt easily to change, and many initially disliked the interlocking “OS”. The “U” denoting the actual university was now missing, upsetting some academic faculty and alumni (Miller, 2007). Furthermore, fans that were accustomed to the original or “vintage” Benny were not supportive of the new interlocking “OS”. Comments from the OSU community believed it represented the university inappropriately, that the “U” in the OSU was an important component of what the university is and those who are a part of it (Oregon Live Comments, 2012).

The branding combination of the “Angry Beaver” and interlocking “OS” for Oregon State lasted until the spring of 2013 when Oregon State University Department of Athletics partnered with Nike in a major rebranding effort to establish an updated, more modern brand identity. Oregon State University Department of Athletics unveiled a comprehensive rebrand for the entire athletic department. Designed by the athletic branding powerhouse Nike, OSU revealed a dramatic rebrand that brought Oregon State athletics into the limelight nationwide.



“Rebranded Beaver” (2013 – present)

## THE “RE-BEAV” CAMPAIGN

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Oregon State University officially unveiled a rebranding that drastically changed the look and feel of Oregon State Athletics. Through a campus fashion show, media releases, social media and local news coverage, Oregon State created a buzz nationwide. OSU paired with athletic retail powerhouse Nike in a two-year process to raise the school’s profile on a national scale (Siemers, 2013).

There are several different reasons Oregon State took the chance on a department wide rebrand. One was to once again attempt to differentiate Oregon State from other OSU schools – specifically The Ohio State University and Oklahoma State University. The 2007 rebrand that introduced the “OS” was intended to do just that, however it was not as effective as originally anticipated. Steve Fenk, OSU’s associate athletics director and head of athletics communication was “hoping that (the “OS” rebrand) would give us an identity nationally and it didn’t really work out too well” (Siemers, 2013). Another motive of the rebrand was to introduce and use a logo that was easier to produce and merchandise. The “Angry Beaver” logo was presented in 1999, and then updated in 2007 with a fourth “brown” color. However, the latest “Angry Beaver” was



difficult and costly to manufacture and sew onto apparel items because of the additional fourth color.

In hopes of creating a rebrand that would honor Oregon State's rich tradition of academics and athletics, Nike worked with OSU student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and alumni to gather information on the brand attributes of the athletic department (Oregon State Athletics Unveils New Brand Identity, 2013). Bob DeCarolis, OSU's Director of Athletics, stated that "the ultimate goal for the rebrand is to attract high-caliber student-athletes to a contemporary brand, while respecting our heritage" (Oregon State Athletics Unveils New Brand Identity, 2013). Then head football coach Mike Riley commented on the rebrand as well, taking to Twitter stating that the rebranding was about three things: "1. Recruiting 2. Recruiting 3. Recruiting" (Berkes, 2013). In interviews, Athletics Department staff members echoed Riley's comments when he/she stated that the rebrand was specifically targeted towards seventeen year-old males and potential athlete recruits.

Recruiting student athletes was one of the major factors that drove the rebranding process, as was becoming more nationally recognized, and a desire to connect with fans. Senior Associate Athletic Director John Rizzardini stated that the staff members pushing for the rebrand "wanted to make an intimate relationship between fans and this university" (Huber, 2013). From there, OSU and Nike collaborated on themes that represented the university and that would drive the rebrand: *Heritage. Strong. Victorious. United. Innovative. Tenacious. Dedicated. Integrity.* Now it was time for Nike to work their branding magic and

to change the face of Oregon State University and the OSU Athletic Department for the better of the program and the fans.

## OSU REBRAND PROCESS

Oregon State University worked closely with Nike to create a new logo and identity for the Oregon State Athletic Department before unveiling it in Spring 2013. The elements that make up the OSU Department of Athletics brand identity include “the colors, graphics, and imagery you communicate with. The way you use the logo. These are the key building blocks that help tell the Oregon State story and shape people’s perception of Oregon State University” (OSU Athletics Media Guide, p. 9). The rebrand was focused around the new brand being exciting and forward-thinking while maintaining tradition and simplicity. The rebrand introduced a new logo, three primary colors of orange, black and white, metallic bronze as a secondary color, new primary typography and word-marks, new secondary typography, and a tartan print.

The new Beaver logo was the most drastic change of the entire rebrand, as it featured a more modern, sleek look that differed greatly from the “Angry Beaver” logo of the past. Unlike the four colors featured in the “Angry Beaver”, the updated beaver head logo contains only three colors, easing the process of producing and merchandising. The new logo now has the potential to stand-alone and to be recognized across the nation. It can also be used in multiple color variations that can accommodate different marketing avenues and athletic team preferences.

### *Outline Variations*



### *One Color Variations*



### *Multiple Color Variations*



### *Texture Variations*



Orange, black, and white are Oregon State University's primary colors. Unlike many other universities across the nation, OSU has traditionally used these colors and these colors only. With the implementation of the rebrand came the addition of a secondary color to the OSU color palette. A metallic bronze color

was added to symbolize “strength and integrity” (OSU Athletics Media Guide, p. 22) As a secondary color however, it is used sparingly and only in addition to the traditional orange, black, and white primary colors.

Typography was another element of the Oregon State rebrand that was updated and modernized. The block letter font chosen creates a consistent look among the Oregon State Athletic Department, and “speaks to the no-nonsense, hardworking nature of players, coaches and fans” that OSU embodies (OSU Athletics Media Guide, p. 24). Each word-mark in the new lettering also symbolizes a uniqueness to Oregon State, and establishes a “clear, consistent, and visually memorable identity” (OSU Athletics Media Guide, p. 26). A secondary typography was also incorporated into the rebrand to complement the primary type-face that would be used among all Oregon State official word-marks.

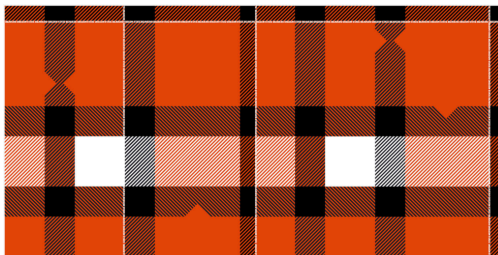
**OSU**<sup>TM</sup>

**BEAVERS**<sup>TM</sup>

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N**  
**O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**



Lastly, a tartan print accents the many elements of the OSU rebrand, and gives a unique richness and sense of tradition to the athletic program. This tartan print is very specific to Oregon State and Oregon State Beavers, as “the notches in the thick lines reference how beavers use their sharp front teeth to take down trees” (Oregon State Media Guide, p. 40). The white lines inside the tartan are compromised of both the “Oregon State” and “Beavers” word-marks, making the tartan print even more exclusive and unique to the university. The tartan is used sparingly, but is distinctive and inimitable, something OSU was originally striving for with the implementation of the rebrand.



## OSU REBRAND OUTCOMES

### *Visibility and Awareness*

In many cases, the purpose of an organization’s rebrand is to alter consumer perceptions. Before engaging in a rebrand, it is important to take into consideration how a rebrand can and will influence loyal consumers, fans,

students, and alumni. In OSU's circumstance, the purpose of the rebrand was to enhance consumer awareness on both the local and national level. The rebrand brought OSU Department of Athletics national attention, especially because of the partnership with Nike. The rebrand brought a significant amount of publicity to OSU, gaining increased consumer awareness among fans and competitors alike.

With a competitive landscape that includes two other large universities (The Ohio State University and Oklahoma State University) with the initials "OSU", especially one with the same orange and black school colors, OSU Department of Athletics needed greater differentiation. The OS was initially created to diminish the confusion between the universities, however it was not effective. In the perception of students and athletics staff alike, the most recent brand made a significant impact on a national scale. Of the students interviewed, all felt as though the rebrand increased consumer awareness and increased OSU's recognition on a national level. Students felt that the rebrand elicited local and national attention, which then led to the increased awareness. One student took into account that "even if it [the rebrand] was a negative change at first, it was change, and people notice that." Another student echoed similar feelings, stating that "there's a lot of people who love it, and there's a lot of people who hate it, but in the end it's publicity."

OSU athletic staff members added that consumer awareness greatly increased because the rebrand sent a message to fans. One staff member explained that "there were some growing feelings of apathy among our fan base, and this (the rebrand) signaled that we are doing something, going forward, this

is the start of it.” When asked if they felt that the rebrand had the potential to increase OSU’s recognition on a national level, the individual responded as follows:

“I do, here’s why: the other logo did not have national recognition... So it wasn’t hard to leave them behind. This [new logo]...what I think it does is it puts you in a place where you’re more attractive to recruits, where your fans are re-energized which in turn drives ticket sales, drives donations, helps teams performs better, which makes a national brand.”

### *Mixed Reactions*

It is not uncommon to see an initial negative response when a rebrand takes place (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004), and Oregon State was no exception. Although it appears that over time reactions changed from negative to positive and the OSU community and fan-base grew accustomed to the new, more modern look of their beloved mascot, Benny. A university, and even more specifically a university athletic department, is only as strong as its community, its fans, and its loyal followers. Even though OSU saw a mix of positive and negative reactions of the initial rebrand release, the growing support and allegiance of the new logo and rebranding has aided in Oregon State’s brand success.

After the release of the rebranding, the OSU community initially displayed a mix of reactions. The logo proved the biggest change for the OSU Athletic Department, and the most difficult part of the rebrand for fans to adjust. Many students on campus conveyed their dissatisfaction towards the rebranding, specifically the new logo. One student stated that at first he was “uneasy about it, and [I] wasn’t very excited about it when I first saw it.” One student, when asked if she felt if OSU students as a whole were in favor of the rebrand when it was

released replied that students were taken aback by it at first because “it was such a 180 look from what we used to have, from the OS to the beaver head.” However she continues to point out that people have gotten used to it because “it still has the same idea of community.” Another student stated, “I think at first they were not in favor of it, but yes now they are. At first with the logo, no one really liked it, but as people got more used to it, they began being more in favor of it.”

Staff within the OSU Department of Athletics received both positive and negative feedback with the release of the rebrand, however they felt responses varied along generation lines. One staff member observed that “the younger the person, the more positive the feedback.” Another staff member echoed this when he/she stated that the athletics department was “met with resistance from older fans and donors who were very aggressively against it.”

Now, two years later, the collective attitude towards the rebrand from students and fans alike seems to be more positive. Students expressed that although the rebrand was aggressively disliked at first, most are now in favor of it. One athletics staff member summed up the mixed rebranding reactions of Oregon State fans, and how they have altered over time as follows:

“When you do a couple exciting things in a sport, and you hire a couple new coaches, win a couple big games, it becomes part of what the fan base is and they embrace it. We’ve had a couple perfect storm moments in the last nine months that have eased any burden left with this.”

### *Tradition and Values*

When a brand identity changes or loses focus in its core values, or the values perceived by consumers, it can result in an inaccurate image of the brand in the public’s mind. The identity then needs to be corrected, altered, or modified,



to meet the needs of the company so it can successfully communicate to consumers its values and influence. Bacon (2014) suggests that branding is more far-reaching than simply creating a new logo or image. How the brand communicates these changes internally and externally is vital to the success of the rebrand. Staff engagement is also crucial in process of a rebrand, as employee engagement and investment will largely determine the success of the new brand identity (Bacon, 2014).

From the initial talks with Nike about the possibility of a rebrand, and throughout the process of creating new branding elements, Oregon State Athletics wanted to prioritize the value of the program and its traditions. The rebrand was to incorporate and keep in mind the values set forth by the Oregon State Athletic department as previously stated: *Heritage. Strong. Victorious. United. Innovative. Tenacious. Dedicated. Integrity.* The results of the rebrand were clear in retaining the values and traditions of the athletic program alive. Both students and staff members agreed that the rebrand stayed true to the heritage of the university and of the Athletic Department. Students felt that the rebrand was consistent with the OSU tradition, and although the uniforms drastically changed, they did not feel it “was changing tradition” however “it was time for new uniforms and an updated logo.” Athletic staff members echoed the positive feelings towards the rebrand because of the “clean, basic, solid, bold without being flashy” look.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

When a rebrand is finally revealed, measuring or evaluating success can be difficult. There are multiple aspects of a rebrand to examine, review, and discuss when the process is complete. The motivation behind a rebrand varies, from altering consumer perception, sending a signal to competitors, or making a needed update or modernization to compete in the current market. If a rebrand is done correctly and clearly achieves all intentions set forth by the company or organization, it can create unity, a stronger brand identity, an increase in brand equity, and demonstrate significant core values to both consumer and competitors (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). When examining Oregon State's rebrand, it is clear that their rebranding achieved many of the intended objectives: differentiation, visibility, and awareness, and an updated image. Although there was an initial resistance from many, the new branding has made a statement.

The 2013 Oregon State rebranding followed a similar path as the brandings that preceded it in 2007 and 1999. It was initially met with resistance and negative feedback from a variety of people. However, there is one thing that fans, students, and staff alike can agree on regarding the most recent rebrand - that is the rebrand was a much-needed change for the athletic department and the university. All students interviewed indicated they had purchased apparel featuring the rebranding marks and the new logo adding that they felt that it was "a step in the right direction", "looks really clean and modern", and is "a new start" for the OSU athletic program. Athletics staff members agreed and expressed a shared feeling that the internal branding needed to coincide with and accurately represent what was happening inside the athletic buildings on campus.

The findings that come from the examination of the rebranding process of the Oregon State Athletic Department clearly demonstrate the motivation of a rebrand, the process behind it, and how it can ultimately prove to be a beneficial and worthwhile risk. A strong university athletic brand stands out among its competitors and is recognizable around the nation. A strong brand increases brand equity, can alter a brand personality, and can connect with consumers in a new and refreshed way. With these combined elements, all roads lead to a more successful brand.

Oregon State University is a good example of a university that needed to engage in an athletic rebranding. They had all the ingredients appropriate for a complete transformation. They had the motivation to be distinct from other “OSU” abbreviated universities such as The Ohio State University and Oklahoma State University. Oregon State wanted greater recognition on a national scale. They wanted to update their athletic brand to attract high-caliber athletes. They wanted to update and modernize, but prioritize tradition, heritage and the dedicated OSU students, alumni and fans.

Oregon State had to be careful in their rebranding. Those loyal to brands do not accommodate to change easily or willingly. Oregon State has a very loyal fan base that includes both students and alumni. Their opinion of the rebrand was an important factor in deciding what elements of the rebrand would be implemented into the athletic program. Many rebrands are met with initial dissatisfaction, and Oregon State’s rebrand was no exception. But over time, consumer perception changed and became increasingly positive.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can see the many risks and benefits of engaging in a rebrand through an examination of the processes and outcomes of the Oregon State University Athletic rebrand. Through the study of brands and rebranding, observations of the OSU rebrand, and discussions with students and athletic staff, we learned about the true purpose of a rebrand and its effects on the brand and its consumers.

Understanding the motivations behind a rebrand and the true purpose of engaging in such an endeavor helps to gage why rebrands of university athletic departments, and rebrands in general, are so important. A rebrand can be elicited by a brand's desire to communicate a new vision or focus in the market, to create a stronger connection with their consumers, or to establish a distinct position among competitors.

Implementing a rebrand can be a big risk for many companies and brands. No one can predict how consumers will react to a change and if their perceptions will be altered, or how competitors will react within the market. It should also be observed whether or not the new message, idea or vision created within the rebrand is being effectively communicated, or if it has become lost in the midst of changes.

Conducting and examining interview responses from both Oregon State students and staff members of the Oregon State Athletic Department, provided two different perspectives. Students were able to provide their observations and opinions of the rebrand from a fan and consumer standpoint. Staff members offered insight into the true motivations and purpose of the OSU rebrand, as well

as information about the process of the rebrand previously unknown to the public.

The rebrand that took place at Oregon State was a significant milestone in the history of the Oregon State University Athletic Department. It was also a unique endeavor in the fact that this was a major rebranding effort put forth by a prominent Division-1 University Athletic Department and a major branding company. The partnership between OSU and Nike was a project that serves as a resource for future rebrands by university athletic departments across the nation.

The success of a rebrand is hard to measure in both the short and long term. Therefore, rebrands should be evaluated based upon the goals or objectives initially set forth by the company initiating the rebrand (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). The overall success of the OSU rebrand is difficult to assess because it is still fairly new, only having been in effect for two years. However we can conclude that OSU did achieve its original goals of differentiation, an increase in national recognition, and the creation of an easier logo to produce and merchandise. OSU's rebranding case study also contributes valuable information to the knowledge on rebranding. The rebrand communicated the importance of brand awareness, that initial negative feedback is not uncommon, and that an extensive rebranding effort by a tradition and value rich Division-1 university athletic department can be very successful.

Through the discussion of the Oregon State Athletic Department rebrand, we have seen the motivations and purpose behind the rebrand, the process of engaging in a rebrand, and the outcomes of the installment of new branding elements through the eyes of both Oregon State students and staff members.

When engaging in a rebrand, it is vital that a company or brand understands and takes into consideration how the change will affect consumer perception, its role in the market, and overall the brands true identity. All things considered, a rebrand can be a beneficial tool in restructuring an organization, altering consumer perception, and defining a clear brand identity, ultimately equating to an overall stronger, more dynamic brand.

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## APPENDIX: Interview Guide – OSU Faculty/Staff

1. When did you first become aware that OSU was undergoing a rebrand?
2. What was your first reaction to the idea of a rebrand?
3. What do you think were the motivations behind doing a rebrand?
4. Oregon State University and OSU athletics is very rich in tradition. Do you feel like the new branding stayed true to that tradition?
5. How did you react to the new logo?
6. Was there support for the rebrand? What were initial reactions to the rebrand?
7. What departments do you think were most affected by the rebrand?
8. Was the timing significant in the release of the rebrand? If so, why/how?
9. Who was the target market of the rebrand?
10. Do you feel as though the rebrand increased consumer awareness? Why or why not?
11. How was the rebrand communicated to the greater OSU fan-base/community?
12. OSU has a very loyal fan-base. Did the change influence their perceptions of the OSU athletic brand? If yes, how so?
13. What consumer feedback did you receive? Was it mostly positive or negative?
14. Do you believe the initial reaction to the rebranding among the OSU community has changed over time? In what way? With certain groups?
15. Do you believe OSU has the potential to be recognized on a more national level because of the rebrand? Why or why not?
16. Were the overall effects of the rebrand, in your perspective, mainly positive or negative? Why?

## APPENDIX: Interview Guide – OSU Students

1. What was your first reaction to the rebrand? To the new Beaver logo?
2. Do you think Oregon State's identity has been enhanced or diminished because of the rebrand? Why?
3. What do you think the OSU community's reaction to the rebranding was?
4. Has your opinion or view of the rebrand, including the new logo, changed since its release?
5. Oregon State University, and OSU athletics is very tradition rich. Do you feel like the new branding stayed true to that?
6. Do you feel as though the rebrand increased consumer awareness? Why or why not?
7. Have you purchased OSU apparel that features the new branding/logo?
8. Do you feel as though OSU students as a whole were in favor of the rebrand when it was released? Why or why not? If not, do you believe they are in favor of it at this point in time?
9. Do you feel as though the OSU student community was united and felt proud to represent our university when the rebrand was released?
10. Do you believe OSU has the potential to be recognized on a more national level because of the rebrand? Why or why not?
11. Overall, was the rebranding of OSU a positive move for Oregon State University?
12. Are you a student at OSU?
13. Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student?
14. Are you an OSU student athlete?