

## **AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE MESSAGES TRANSMITTED BY THE UNIVERSITIES MOTTOS**

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**Abstract.** *The purpose of this paper is to present some results of our empirical research on the messages transmitted by the universities mottos. In a global market for higher education, universities must compete for students re-thinking their offer, and their attractors. One of these attractors is the motto of the university, which suggests an inspiring message. Not all universities have chosen a motto, but many of them have done it. We considered 365 such mottos and we performed a frequency analysis of their components. That means, we analysed the most frequent words used and the key meanings associated with them. These meanings are found also in the vision and mission statements of the chosen universities.*

**Keywords:** higher education, meanings, mottos, universities.

### **1. On the dynamics of the number of students**

To be a student is almost ordinary nowadays. *„The expansion of tertiary education has been remarkable in recent decades. Globally, in 2004, 132 million students enrolled in tertiary education, up from 68 million in 1991. Average annual growth in tertiary enrolment over the period 1991-2004 stood at 5.1% worldwide“* (Santiago *et al.*, 2008, p. 14).

The data shows that for these two decades, worldwide enrolment growth in higher education has exceeded the most optimistic forecasts. Growth is rather accelerating as more governments see the rapid expansion of higher education as a key factor in their transition from developing to developed country status (<http://answers.yahoo.com>).

Today (<http://www.bloombiz.ro>) more than 2.500.000 students go to study in countries other than their native countries – a 70% higher rate in the late 10 years – the number being increasing. There is an estimation that in 2025, about 7.500.000 students will learn abroad. According to the same source, with its 400.000 students studying in foreign universities, China passes in front of India with more than 250.000. Due to the mobility of the Chinese students, the Asian students represent 45% of the whole number of students studying abroad, being followed by the European students – 28%, African students – 12%, and the students from the two Americas – 10%.

According to the data given by The National Council for Financing Higher Education, The National Institute of Statistics, The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation and the data available from international sources (EUROSTAT, UNESCO) between 1998-2006, the population of Romania was noticed to have a decreasing tendency in this respect (from 21.988.810 in 1998, to 21.610.213 in 2006). However, quoting the same sources, we notice that the number of students from the Romanian public (budget and taxes) had an increasing rate (from 249.875, in 1998, to 628.878, in 2006). This situation can be explained by considering three main factors:

1) Starting with 1999 the higher legislation has been changed in order to implement a new financing system for the state universities, based on the concept of equivalent number of students, and some coefficients related to field complexity (Brătianu & Lefter, 2001; Dincă & Korca, 2001; Nica, 1998).

2) State universities could have students payed from the governmental budget and students paying themselves tuition and fees (Marga, 2007).

3) First private universities have been accredited in 2001, a moment of significant increase in the number of students absorbed by these universities.

We presented this data only to show the dimension of the higher education business on the global market, and to stress the importance of each university in constructing efficient attractors for their potential students. In two previous papers we performed qualitative analyses of the vision and mission statements for universities and companies, demonstrating the search for new and powerful meanings of these organizations (Brătianu & Jianu, 2007; Brătianu & Bălănescu, 2008).

## 2. A map of mottos

On the site [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_university\\_mottos#Argentina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_university_mottos#Argentina) there is a list of mottos coming from 365 universities. Their distribution on countries (Table 1) is not representative, but it could be a basis to analyse the messages these mottos transmit to their stakeholders.

*Table 1*

**The list of the mottos**

Country	Number of quoted universities	Country	Number of qoted universities
South Africa	10	Malaysia	10
Argentina	2	Great Britain	37
Australia	18	Mexic	8
Belgium	5	New Zealand	3
Botswana	1	Netherlands	13
Brasil	5	Pakistan	4
Canada	53	Poland	2
South Coreea	6	The Popular Republic of China	15
Danmark	3	Russia	2
Fiji	1	Spain	15

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Country	Number of quoted universities	Country	Number of quoted universities
Phillipines	15	The United States of America	117
Finland	2	Sweden	2
Germany	4	Togo	1
Honk Kong	3	Ucraina	3
Italy	5		

### 3. Methodology

According to *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2000) a *motto* is a short sentence or phrase that expresses the aims and beliefs of a person, a group, or an organization. Being very synthetic, a motto focuses on key concepts and creates a spectrum of meanings. Thus, a motto is not precise like a mathematical equation. On the contrary, it is rather fuzzy and works like a metaphor (Andriessen 2006; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). According to Andriessen „*Metaphors provide a perspective on the world that help to construct it in a certain way, emphasizing certain key characteristics and ignoring others*”(2006, p.94). Some universities use mottos to increase the suggestion power for their potential students about their mission, in order to get more chances for building up their competitive advantage in a strategic analysis (Carpenter & Sanders, 2007; Dess, Lumpkin & Eisner, 2006).

We considered three main working hypotheses: 1) students pay attention to the message embedded in the university motto; 2) a motto reflects the university cultural organization and its vision; 3) a motto is constructed from key words. Consequently, we fragmented the mottos into its component key words being aware that, in this way, their message could be partially altered.

Then we classified the key words in the following categories: a) *motivations*, b) *reasons*, c) *conditions*, d) *action and effort*, e) *goals*, f) *human qualities and g) outcomes*. Analysing their frequencies we could identify the main semantic directions of the university motto.

### 4. Results interpretation

For *motivations*, the potential students could be attracted by the following themes: *life in itself* (10), *to hope and dream* (4), *to have aspirations* (3), *to be a torch, a leading light* (1). Numbers in parentheses show the key words frequencies. On the other hand, the potential students are told the fact that everybody has access to the full learning environment, and that *teaching has an open and interactive characteristic* (4); students become this way an active part of the learning environment. We shall consider two inspiring examples: „*Nothing is too heavy for those who have wings*“ and „*I lift my eyes to the mountains*“.

For *reasons*, a potential students might be thinking of *divinity* (God and Christ), *the Bible* – the basic book dear to all Christians (26), and *faith* in its general

connotation (5). *Love for their homeland, the link between town and the source and origins of their life or family* are, in the context we studied, important reasons and beliefs which can sustain the student and support them in their academic effort of professional formation and learning (11). Mottos recall *tradition* (2), *devotion, respect, love and care for parents* (1) or *the obligation and honor to respect royalty* (2). *The respect for law* and its instruments (5) is associated with *love and duty for one's homeland* (1), with *patriotism* (1) and also *duty towards the country of origin* (1). According to certain mottos, *to learn means honor* (3) and *virtue* (11). Themes like *destiny* (1), *respect for values* (1) are rarely met comparing to *nature, world, the whole universe* (9). The most frequently met reasons are linked to those of future and future fulfillment: *future, tomorrow* and *the way to follow* (14). A motto like „*Futurae Generis Humani Fides*” could be a summary of all reasons making students to study in a certain university.

We considered that students are suggested by mottos that they must accept certain **conditions** in order to have the proper ground for their expectations: *perseverance* in their effort to learn, *research* and *discover* (7). In a certain context they are warned that a difficult time and a trial will come for them; they must give proof of their *discipline* (3), *perseverance and rigor* (2), *endurance* (1), and *dedication* (2). *The openness towards their fellow equals*, their *appreciation* (5), but also *the admittance of certain differences* (2), these are intrinsic conditions of any proper academic life. The following could be some illustrative examples: „*What you do, do well*”, „*Other people have their point of view*“, „*Always open*”.

What **efforts** must and should make a student in his attempt to form himself? What is the meaning of learning? We saw from these mottos a certain urge *to action, to deeds* (2), *to fight* (5). The theme of *work* appears 15 times in the 365 studied mottos and the need to *search* and *research* (11) can be satisfied by using one's own *hands* (5), but mainly by the effort of one's *mind* (16). Students must be always alert, to prove their intellectual dynamism and *creativity* (6). Last but not least, students are warned that their effort must be continuous, that learning is not over when graduating. *The continuous learning and forming* is the theme appearing 31 times on the chart we have studied, which prove the message for lifelong learning. Mottos like „*I am still learning*“, „*With mind and hand*”, „*Hands on the present and eyes for the future*“, „*Through knowledge and hard work*”, „*In the mountains, of the mountains, for the mountains*” are clear in their simplicity.

The category of **goals** is generous. Students are reassured that their *effort has a sense* (5) and a *goal* (5), that it is *useful* and *fruitful* (2) and that it will lead to a *solid future* (3) both for them and for the society. The *success* of their studies will have a *reward* (2); this might be *glory, welfare* or *fortune* (2). Moreover, *success* leads to *excellence* (8), to the status of being the best in the domain you studied. Who has the benefit of studying? Obviously those students who get *experience, launch* themselves in a career, *increase* and *develop personally* (36). Some mottos speak about the

*discovery of light* (42) and *truth* (42), about the fact that *men can become sacred in themselves* (2). Of the knowledge acquired by a graduate, *society, nations and all people can have a benefit* (12). This picture is completed by *the flourishing and welfare of all human beings* (5), who will live in *peace and progress* (3). Thus, the world will live in *unity and harmony* (6) and will be prepared to accept *the change* (4) induced by the dynamics of the global business environment. The generic aims and goals are by far: *to know, to do, to be*. „*Think. Grow. Change*“, „*Freely you have received, Freely give*“, „*Education for service*“, „*Not for one's self, but for one's own*“, „*For God and Humanity*“, „*To learn, to search, to serve*“ are some of the mottos illustrating the goals to be attained.

By studying, the graduates will acquire or develop notable **human qualities**. They will be *proud* of their studies (4) and the competences they acquired will allow them to be more *diligent, wiser, and courageous* (27) in their future professional and social life. Openness towards human beings is an attainable character area for any student or graduate: they could be *better, kinder, more helpful and sympathetic* (5). Features and qualities like *integrity* (2), *dignity* (1), *perseverance* and a *strong personality* (13) will give the student the force to respect *the norms of morals* (2). *Generosity and altruism* (3), but also *charity* (2) will be *elegantly manifest* (1), with *friendship and devotion* (5). To understand the needs of other human beings and *compassion* (2) are important emotional dimensions for any student. Among the mottos stating the words above we have chosen „*Education for citizenship*“ – a common goal for all universities, but also „*Education, the guardian of society*“.

We have also identified and focus on certain *outcomes* obtained as a consequence of attending academic courses, as they are seen in the spectrum of mottos we used for our research. With *joy* (4), getting an academic graduation will lead to *engagement and social implication* (8). The received *education* (5) will be a *gain both for yourself and for the whole society* (8), it will be a proof and a basis for seeing *the liberty* as something attainable and achievable (15). The graduate is promised to obtain *self-confidence* (3). They will make also proof of *new thinking models* (1), will have a genuine *intellectual horizon* (2) and will prove that *erudition* (4) can lead to *spiritual development* (4). *The triumph of reason on force* (1) will be huge reward for both individuals and humankind. The *quality of knowledge* (44) will allow the specialists to prove the *pragmatism* (1), to be *creative and inspired* (1) and be able to initiate and support a successful *entrepreneurial way* (2). Acquiring a competence of *innovation* (3) is a desirable result as a first step in research as *discoveries* (3) in the field the graduate studied. Moreover *to serve* (15) is a major theme on the chart of mottos we are speaking about. The academic studies prepare the students to become *leaders* (6) in their careers. And, in the end, the most important result of the academic studies is the development of *culture* (7), *science and technique* (10). „*Making life better*“ is the message we have chosen to illustrate that the academic studies truly accomplish and fulfil a human being and they are worth the effort.

## 5. Synthesis

In the spectrum of 365 mottos we identified 114 key words appearing with frequencies between 1 and 44, and we made a selection of those appearing with frequencies of at least 10. In Figure 1 we show the key words with a frequency between 5% and 12%, and in Figure 2 the words with a frequency between 3% and 5%.

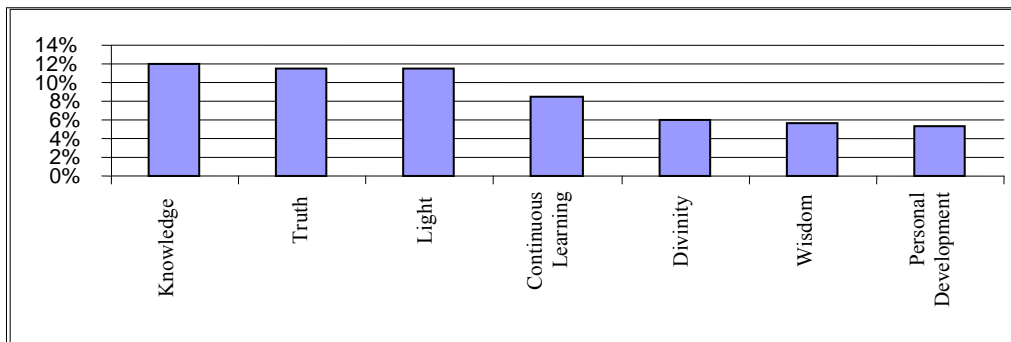


Figure 1. Key words with frequencies between 5% and 12%

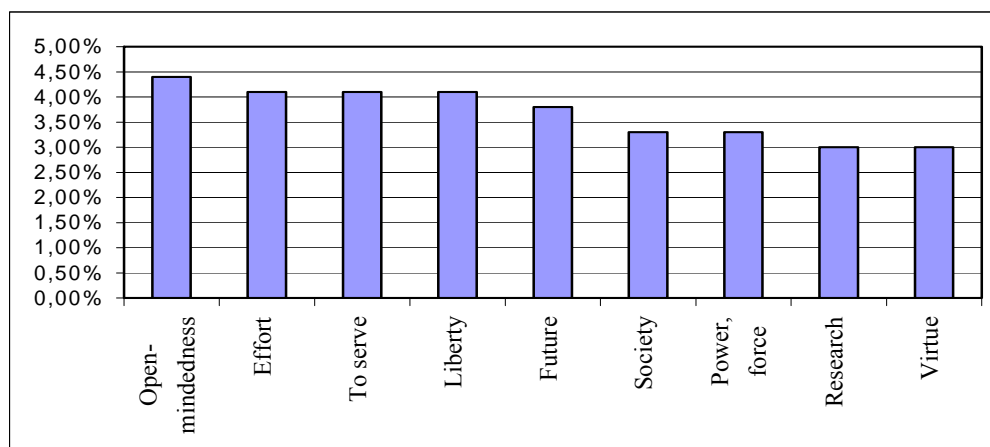


Figure 2. Words with frequencies between 3% and 5%

## 6. The Mottos of some Romanian Universities

We wanted to perform a comparative analysis with the Romanian universities. However, out of the 56 state universities and 50 private universities only 12 have a motto (Table 2). The following key words, taken from the mottos studied, are the

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same with the ones in the synthesis of the above research: *education, knowledge, research, open-mindedness, community, future*. There are some other key words of similar frequency in the mottos of some foreign universities: *excellence, partnership, performance, competition, trust, innovation, multiculturalism, certainty, open spirit, success, tradition, values and dynamism*.

*Table 2*

**The list of the Roumanian universities mottos**

University	Motto
The Academy of Economic Studies of București	Partners in performance!
The National Academy of Sports and Physical Education of București	Citius. Altius. Fortius!
The „1 decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia	Competition, dynamism, performance
The Aurel Vlaicu University of Brasov	„The goal of education is to change an empty mind into an open mind.“ (Malcom Forbes)
The University of Bacau	We are innovative and dedicated to excellency.
The Transilvania University of Brasov	Trust and excellency
The University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca	A successful European University
The „Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca	Multicultural tradition in European values
The „Politehnica” University of Timișoara	„Not the walls make a school but its spirit“ King Ferdinand I, 1923
The University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine of Banat of Timișoara	The future of the university is yours. Make it!
The West University of Timișoara	„Our mission is to promote knowledge, research and instruction through partnership among students, professors and community. “
The National Academy of Information of Bucharest	Through knowlwdge to a safer world

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is to perform a qualitative and quantitative research concerning the attractiveness of universities mottos for their potential students, and for their stakeholders. Mottos are by their own nature fuzzy semantic constructions and they suggest different messages according to the force lines of the semantic field created by the university. A motto can be a useful attractor for the potential students, and thus many universities associate such mottos to their vision and mission statements. We search for a spectrum of 365 universities mottos worldwide, and performed a frequency analysis of the key words. Then we provided interpretations based on some meaning clusters. Although our findings have a relative power, the point is that mottos can be valuable attractors for universities in their effort of getting a competitive advantage.

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