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Constructing Public Image Through Epideictic Rhetoric

ABSTRACT

When organizations are faced with public inquiry regarding an issue, or want to reinforce organizational values, they often turn to positive epideictic rhetoric as a way of praising the organization for its accomplishments, and looking toward the future. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) was established in part to address the chronic shortage of health care professionals in Northern Ontario, and with the first graduating class of medical school undergraduates in June 2009, public inquiry about NOSM's effect on this issue arose. As NOSM does not have the means as of yet to directly address people's concerns regarding its impact on the physician shortage, they turn to methods of strategic epideictic communication to manage inquiry. Using Kenneth Burke's method of cluster criticism to examine a selection of public communication artifacts from NOSM, I demonstrate how the use of epideictic rhetoric emphasizes shared values between NOSM and its primary audience. Stressing shared values (improved rural medicine, leadership, innovation, excellence, celebration, cultural diversity, social accountability, community, uniqueness, and economic contribution) and focusing on the School's positive contributions and achievements, causes for celebration, and positive community partnerships, deflects attention away from the issue. In addition, it enforces audience identification with the School, the personal ethos of the School's Dean, and the overall ethos of the organization.