IMAGES AS A LAYER OF POSITIVE RHETORIC: A VALUES-BASED CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN VISUAL AND VERBAL ELEMENTS FOUND ON A RURAL NATURAL RESOURCES NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION WEBSITE

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A VALUES-BASED CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN
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RESOURCES NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION WEBSITE

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii  
Table of Contents iii  
Preface iv  
Introduction 1  

The Environmental Context and Social Background 2  
Exploring the Role of the Visual in Rhetorical Studies and on the Internet 7  
Research Questions and Evaluative Criteria 16  
The Swan Ecosystem Center Website 18  
Finding Purpose and Values in the Text and Images 28  
Audience Interpretation of Textual Value Statements 42  
Image Values and Increasing Audience Identification 48  
Practical Implications 55  
Conclusion 57  

References 58  

Appendices  
Appendix A: Swan Valley Land Ownership Map 61  
Appendix B: SEC Motto/Logo 62  
Appendix C: Table of Values in Text and Images 63  
Appendix D: A Guide for NPO Website Designers 64
Preface

Growing up in the Black Hills of South Dakota, I developed a strong love for the environment and rural culture of the west. I enjoyed running through the open, undeveloped spaces that surrounded my hometown, which nurtured inside of me an appreciation for the environment, and gave me the closest feeling to faith and spirituality that I have known. Throughout this time, I also developed appreciation and respect for the people who surrounded me: their mindsets, their occupations, and the lives that they lived. In both my undergraduate and graduate studies, I had the opportunity to explore the intersections between the “natural” world and how it exists around, beside, among, and perhaps within humans. I explored organizational communication, rhetoric, natural resources policy, and conflict, investigating mediation, public processes, and natural resources collaboration. However, when I first arrived at the “big city” of Missoula, I felt disconnected from the environment I knew so well. I took a Winter Wilderness Field Studies course, and I found a place that gave me a similar kind of peace and connection that I felt in the Black Hills: the Swan Valley. I encountered the Swan Ecosystem Center then, my first experience with a non-profit organization working towards promoting awareness about environmental issues. Since, I have encountered many grassroots organizations in the Missoula area that strive to promote sustainability, education and stewardship for the environment. Follows is my rhetorical exploration of the Swan Ecosystem Center website. I hope that this paper will benefit not only the Swan Ecosystem Center, but other grassroots environmental organizations, in helping them determine techniques on how to improve the consistency of the textual discourse and visual rhetoric found on their websites.
INTRODUCTION

The website of the Swan Ecosystem Center, a collaborative organization working on local natural resource issues in rural Montana, provides a rich, unexplored site for rhetorical study. Conflict in the Swan Valley fostered the growth of the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC), a unique social climate from which the organization grew and in which it now exists. The organization has now been in existence for over ten years, and has created and maintained a website during that time. The website, consisting of visual and textual rhetoric, is an important tool for the SEC to communicate with the public and with potential grantors. To better understand visual rhetoric and how it may, or may not, reinforce textual discourse on this organization’s website, I first review the literature concerning visual rhetoric and the internet. Then, I determine the values emerging from the text on the website and explore how the images on the website reflect those same value statements. Finally, I use this analysis to create a list of guidelines for website designers to improve the rhetorical consistency of the images and text on their websites.
THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

The Swan Valley lies between two mountain ranges. Driving north through the valley bottom on Highway 83, the Swan Range looms on the right, sharp peaks outlined by snow, the Bob Marshall Wilderness farther east, beyond range of sight. To the west is the Mission Mountain Range, providing a landscape of mountainous terrain that harbors a wilderness area. The Swan Valley bottom itself “is home to over 1000 glacially derived wetlands. In fact, approximately 16% of the land in the Swan Valley is considered wetlands habitats (lakes, rivers, ponds, marshes, wet meadows, peatlands and riparian areas), far more than the average 1% found in other Montana valleys” (Swan Valley Conservation, 2008). Additionally, the relatively undeveloped condition of this landscape provides habitat for a multitude of flora and fauna, some of which are considered threatened or endangered, such as grizzly bear and wolves. The Swan Valley and surrounding mountain ranges are the quintessential northwestern Montana landscape that one expects to find: relatively unspoiled and sparsely populated.

However, the pristine beauty of the Swan Valley environment belies the complexity of the land ownership patterns and human relationships that exist on that landscape. According to the Swan Valley Conservation website,

Land ownership in the Swan Valley is partitioned in a ‘checkerboard’ pattern, a legacy of the railroad land grants in the late 1800’s. Most of the Swan Valley is publicly owned and managed either by the Flathead National Forest (green), or the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (blue). A significant portion of the valley bottom (over 70,000 acres) is owned by Plum Creek Timber Company (purple). Small private land holdings in the Swan Valley (white) are concentrated near the towns of Bigfork and Swan Lake to the north, and Condon to the south. These lands were either homesteads carved out of federal lands or parcels purchased from Plum Creek or its predecessor, Burlington Northern (2008). (See Appendix A)

This ‘checkerboard’ land ownership pattern is a phenomenon that emerged out of
historical distribution of lands and creates a complex situation in terms of land management. Nearly every other square mile of land is owned by a different landowner (Cestero, 1997, pp. 40-41), including: private landowners; a private corporate entity, Plum Creek Timber Company; state land management, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC); the United States Forest Service (USFS). Complicating the situation even further is that the rather undeveloped condition of the landscape provides habitat for many rare species of plants and animals that are protected by federal mandate: all the landowners must abide by these mandates and protect the habitat of those plants and animals.

In the midst of this landscape and its complex divisions and mandates, residents of the Swan Valley in the early 1980’s had their own concerns about “growth, forest management and economic transition” (Cestero, 1997, p.49). Ecologically and socially, the increasing population in the Swan Valley was a concern to most residents. Residents in the valley also felt increasing frustration with the USFS in both its decision-making processes and direct management of the forest (Cestero, 1997). Additionally, in the mid-1980’s, the Swan Valley was making a “transition from a historically high dependence on timber to a more diversified economy” (Cestero, 1997, p. 53), which amplified the differences between the people who were dependent on logging for their livelihoods and those people who were not.

In the late 1980’s, these conditions culminated to create a community in the Swan Valley that was sharply divided by natural resource issues. Public meetings were filled with angry people representing polarized viewpoints: screaming matches and signs emphasizing the division between environmentalists and those people dependent on the
timber industry were rampant, but “amidst all this rancor, a few residents were sowing the seeds of what would become the Swan Citizens ad hoc Committee” (Cestero, 1997, p. 84). Out of the conflict, and with the help a professional facilitator, many residents and resource organizations committed to creating a more productive dialogue about natural resource issues emerged over the course of the next few years, creating the Swan Citizens ad hoc Committee. According to the Swan Valley Conservation website, “the Swan Citizen’s Ad Hoc Committee was one of the first citizen’s groups to initiate dialogue between loggers and environmentalists and pioneer solutions to controversial land use issues” (2008). The people who participated in the ad hoc meetings represented viewpoints from all sides of the debate, but were uniformly committed to re-building the relationships in the Swan Valley and addressing ecological concerns as well as the “declining timber industry” in the Swan Valley (Cestero, 1997, p. 85). The participants in the Swan Citizens ad hoc Committee considered themselves a collaborative organization: when decisions were made, the participants came to those decisions by consensus (Cestero, 1997, p. 87). Eventually, a sub-committee of the ad hoc Committee created the non-profit organization known as the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) in 1996.

It is important as this point, however, to clarify the parties that were, and still are, involved in the conflict in the valley and the collaborative efforts. Labeling the stakeholders as either “loggers” or “environmentalists” both polarizes and simplifies the situation. According to Anne Dahl, the executive director of the SEC, the main parties involved in the collaboration are not only local residents but the “SEC, Forest Service, DNRC, MTFWP, USFWS, Plum Creek, Trust for Public Land, Montana Land Reliance, Vital Ground, Northwest Connections, Friends of the Wild Swan, [and] MTDEQ”
In order for effective collaborative work to occur, all of these entities should work together on the natural resource issues in the Swan Valley. In fact, working together is a necessity because of the complex land ownership patterns and mandates that the owners must abide by, as described earlier in this section. According to Dahl (2008), the SEC served a vital role in convening the above parties in order for the collaborative process to begin and continue in the Swan Valley. It follows that the SEC must take into consideration all of these parties when considering the message the organization conveys on its website. It is also important to note here that there are people in the valley who do not support the collaborative process and/or what the SEC is doing. According to Dahl (2008), the SEC wants to “use the Web site to provide facts and dispel gossip and myths spread among the skeptics” (Dahl, 2008). Those people, too, must be considered when designing the rhetorical message on the website.

The SEC first posted its website online “about ten years ago” (Dahl, 2008). The original purpose of the website was to inform online visitors about the SEC. Not only has the SEC designed its website to vocalize its mission, vision, and other organizational information to the public, but it has also been designed to educate visitors about the ecosystem and about organizational programs, events, and actions. Other pages serve as resources for the public in regard to history of the valley, education programs for local students, and the importance of volunteers to the organization, to name a few. All of these pages serve as informational sites for visitors to the website to learn more about living in the Swan Valley ecosystem or to learn more about SEC organizational activities. The SEC is now redesigning its website “to make it easier to use and better explain our purpose and projects” (Dahl, 2008). The intended audience of the SEC website is
primarily the local culture, people who reside in (or care about) the Swan Valley and the actions that the SEC is taking within the valley. People who also may be visiting the website may be invested in the organization itself, including board members, employees, volunteers, and other organizational entities, including potential donors and current grantors (Dahl, 2008). With this background of the organization and website in mind, it is now important to examine the literature of how visual and verbal rhetoric intersects with the internet.
EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE VISUAL IN RHETORICAL STUDIES AND ON THE INTERNET

As quoted by Olson (2007), “rhetoric is best characterized broadly as symbolic action. While individual instances of rhetorical practice might differ to the extent that they are more or less textual, oratorical, or visual, what is common to all rhetorical acts is that they all mobilize symbols to persuade” (p. 13). Taking this definition at face value, we can determine that persuasive messages are delivered to audiences not only through text and the spoken word, but also through artifacts and images. However, throughout the history of rhetorical study, “linguistic artifacts” (Foss, 2004, p. 303) have taken a prominent role as subjects of study for scholars in the discipline, rather than all symbolic action (Salinas, 2002). It follows that rhetorical theory is primarily associated with this linguistic emphasis and that “rhetoricians largely lack sophisticated understanding of the conventions through which meaning is created in visual artifacts and the processes by which they influence viewers” (Foss, 2004, p. 303). Indeed, the study of visual communication, visual persuasion, and visual argument has been a burgeoning area in the field of rhetoric since the 1950’s, emerging especially since the year 2000 (Olson, 2007). Rhetorical scholars have realized that with the increasing number of visual stimuli in our society, particularly on the internet, the “rhetoric of the visual” (Goggin, 2004) has an increasing influence on discourse, cultures, and society; thus, the rhetoric of images and other artifacts merits increased attention from the field, including the rhetoric found on the internet.

According to Kent (2001), viewing the web through the metaphor of managerial rhetoric sheds some important insight into the internet as a communication tool. Kent
(2001) explains that audience members who visit websites are “self-selected” (p. 369). Everyone who visits a website has chosen to go to that site, and anyone can choose to leave immediately or stay for as long as they care to. Additionally, Kent (2001) asserts that information-gathering is a primary expectation of audiences who visit the web. The website functions as a sort of mouthpiece for an organization, to transmit its activities and information to those audiences mentioned above. That said, of those potential audiences, those who choose to visit a website most likely are visiting to gain information about the organization and its programs. However, those visitors will confront both text and visuals when visiting that website, therefore, they will be gaining information from both text and imagery on the website they visit.

Foss (2004) defines the term visual rhetoric in two ways, both as a “communicative artifact” (p. 304) and a scholarly perspective. Specifically, when rhetorical scholars refer to visual rhetoric as a communicative artifact, Foss (2004) argues that they are speaking of the “the tangible evidence or product of the creative act, such as a painting, an advertisement, a photograph, or a building and constitutes the data of study for rhetorical scholars interested in visual symbols” (p. 304). Further, these data must fulfill three requirements: “they must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating” (Foss, 2004, p. 304). Images that are considered rhetoric, then, should be designed or created with an intended audience in mind, a vital concept to the creation of visual rhetoric, indeed, rhetoric of all sorts. As a scholarly perspective, Foss (2004) continues, visual rhetoric can be defined as “a theoretical perspective that involves the analysis of the symbolic or communicative aspects of visual artifacts. It is a critical-analytical tool or a way of approaching and
analyzing visual data that highlights the communicative dimensions of images or objects” (p. 305). Images can be valued for their aesthetics alone; however, in the study of visual rhetoric, Foss (2004) highlights the importance of a rhetorical response where “meaning is attributed to the artifact. Colors, lines, textures, and rhythms in an artifact provide a basis for the viewer to infer the existence of images, emotions, and ideas” (2004, p. 306). It is this attribution of meaning which allows rhetorical scholars to focus on the persuasive message of the image. Foss (2004) states that a rhetorician can evaluate objects “with a focus on one of three areas—nature, function, or evaluation. In this pillar of the framework for studies of visual rhetoric, nature deals with the components, qualities, and characteristics of visual artifacts; function concerns the communicative effects of visual rhetoric on audiences; and evaluation is the process of assessing visual artifacts” (p. 307). I intend to make use of this framework later in my discussion.

Hill (2004) explains that imagery often falls into the category of vivid information, which is especially powerful in prompting strong responses from audiences, and is often used in marketing campaigns. In the case of marketing campaigns, it is important for the rhetor to use images that create those strong responses very carefully. Instead of using one powerful image, Hill (2004) urges rhetors to create a campaign of positive images and text that resonate with the audience and build up over time. Hill (2004) emphasizes the concept of presence, where the audience is consistently exposed to positive images or text to the point where that is the foremost thought of the subject, and other, less favorable elements of the subject are less influential. Crucial to my discussion is this concept that text and images work together to create a rhetorical message: visitors to a website encounter not only visual elements, but textual elements, the combination of
which can work together to create a more powerful rhetorical message if their meanings are consistent.

There is agreement among scholars that visual communication and verbal communication can work together to add to the persuasiveness of a particular message (Birdsell and Groarke, 1996; Blair, 2004; Hagen, 2007). In the context of the internet, many scholars explore this idea that visual persuasion is often accompanied and/or enhanced by verbal or textual discourse, as well (Lemke, 2002; Hocks, 2003; Salinas, 2002). This interplay between the visual and the verbal, what Hocks (2003) terms “hybridity” (p. 632), is especially important when considering visual rhetoric and verbal discourse when analyzing a website. Lemke (2002) highlights this relationship, asserting that “visual communication is at its most powerful […] when it takes its place as an equal (and equally often as the leading) partner in multimodal communication” (p. 323). In this sense, the interplay between the visual and the verbal on a website can strengthen the persuasive power of the message.

However, scholars are also careful to acknowledge that although visual and verbal messages may be delivered together to create a persuasive message, the meanings of the two may not be “equivalent or identical. There are good reasons for questioning whether they have a similar capacity to convey relatively precise meanings” (Birdsell and Groarke, 1996, p. 5). In this vein, some scholars assert that visual rhetoric can express persuasive messages that are not present in the verbal discourse surrounding certain issues (Palczewski, 2005; DeLuca, 1999). Seppänen and Väliverronen (2003) specifically suggest that photographs help construct the meanings of abstract terms in environmental discourse. In the context of technical communication, Hocks (2003) notes
that competing discourses may be expressed on the same webpage through the use of either visual or verbal elements. Even though text and an image may be placed side by side, the two may or may not be congruent with each other, and thus may decrease the overall impact and consistency of the persuasive message that the rhetor is trying to convey. Ultimately, this interplay between the text and the images used on the SEC website is what I am seeking to explore.

Because of the potential complexities this interplay may create, a rhetor should have special sensitivity to the target audiences, or cultures, that he or she is addressing when creating visual rhetoric (Blair, 2004; Ross, 2008). Birdsell and Groark (1996), in particular, insist that rhetorical scholars must pay special attention to the immediate visual and verbal context of the situation, as well as the larger cultural context when evaluating visual persuasion. Specifically, rhetors should take into special consideration the following elements when thinking of the audience: the influence of vivid visual elements and how best to make use of them (Hill, 2004; Richards and David, 2005), context (Birdsell and Groarke, 1996), and audience expectations (Goggin, 2004; Foss, 2004). Blair (2004) notes that a rhetor should appeal to his or her intended audience by knowing their beliefs and values, as well as the appropriate imagery to resonate with those values. Specifically, “the arguer needs to be sensitive to the surrounding argumentative ‘space’ of the audience, because so much of the [visual] argument must remain tacit or unexpressed” (Blair, 2004, p. 52). Ross (2008) asserts that in creating a graphic, the rhetor must make decisions “in direct relation to desired social affect and cultural ideals” (p. 91). Whether referred to as “argumentative space” or “social affects and cultural ideals,” a rhetor must craft very carefully the text and images in accordance
with the audience that he or she intends to target.

Technical communication scholars also agree that a rhetor should have special sensitivity to the target audience, or culture, that he or she is addressing when creating visual rhetoric for the internet (Hocks, 2003). Salinas (2002) in particular claims that “rhetoric is not so much a science of making functional objects derived from abstract reasoning, but more a strategic art of producing useful artifacts derived from a contextualized social savvy” (p. 172). In this sense, a website can be regarded as a public relations tool (Kang and Norton, 2004; Kent, Taylor, and White, 2003) that an organization can use to enhance its relationship with those who choose to visit it.

Websites are also reflective of the ethos, or credibility, of the organization (Hunt, 2003; Jones, 2005), another aspect of audience analysis that a creator of a website must be sensitive to. Some specific strategies for creating ethos for a website include considering “the currency of its imagery, the perceived trustworthiness of the source, or the perceived trustworthiness of the information itself” (Bunz, 2001, p. 3). In this sense, the creators of the website must consciously be aware of who may visit their site and how they can construct the messages on the site to create the best sense of goodwill within their individual audience members.

To explicate the idea of connecting with audience members, I turn to Burke’s (1962) theory of identification. Burke writes that “A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (p. 544). Key to this is the idea of one party persuading the other that their interests are joined. If one party is persuaded through symbolic acts, or
rhetoric (whether that be textual or visual), that there are similar values between them, the
first party may be more likely to identify with the other. In the case of an organization, if
the organization expresses values that a person may agree with, then that person may
believe that the organization (and him- or herself) have “common sensations, concepts,
images, ideas, attitudes” and identify with the organization to a greater degree (Burke,
1962, p. 545). If identification with the organization increases, that person may be more
likely to support what the organization does. On the same token, however, Burke claims
that the concept of division is important to the idea of identification. He states that “in
pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in
absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground
that makes their communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for
their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so
that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have
the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (Burke, 1962, p. 549). Division and conflict,
then, create a space for communication and potential for identification.

For an organization such as the SEC, this is an especially appropriate distinction
to draw, considering that the recent history of the Swan Valley is riddled with conflict
and strife over natural resource issues. It was the division and potential identifications
that created a space for the SEC in the Swan Valley to begin communication among the
different parties involved in the conflict. Burke continues, saying that “often we must
think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of
identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull
daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill” (1962, p. 550). It stands to
reason that increased identification with multiple parties is what the SEC is seeking in designing their website, and it is important to discover what body of identifications may occur on the SEC website. This body of identifications will emerge as I embark upon my analysis of the textual and visual rhetoric below.

Ultimately, there are many possible ways in which audience members may identify with an organization, however, the emphasis of my study is on the value statements found on the SEC website. After discovering what the organization’s values are through textual analysis, I will make use of the concepts of polyseme, polyvalence, and multivalence to determine the different ways that the organization’s values might appeal to multiple audiences. All three of these concepts deal with the ideas that different values can either be drawn from or emerge from a text. Specifically, polyseme refers to the idea that different audiences can find different meanings in the text. These meanings can be varied and potentially contradictory, but ultimately, different audiences can find different messages emerging from one single text (Fiske, 1986b). Polyvalence “occurs when audience members share understandings of the denotations of a text but disagree about the valuation of those denotations to such a degree that they produce noticeably different interpretations” (Condit, 1989, p. 106). In other words, different readers may interpret the same message in the text, but they may appraise that message differently according to their beliefs. Stroud (2002) defines multivalent texts as those that can use seemingly contradictory value structures and statements to entice the auditor. The auditor must then understand and reconstruct how these values, some of which may be familiar and desirable, can coexist without cognitive dissonance or contradiction. The task becomes finding how these disparate value statements can be reconciled in one’s understanding of the text, not simply finding what one desires in the text (polysemy) or evaluating the text based upon one’s held values (polyvalence)” (p. 379).
In other words, differing, sometimes conflicting value statements can occur in a text, and the reader must find a way to make sense of those conflicting values.

Though much debate has occurred in the field in relation to polyseme, polyvalence, and multivalence, and I could dedicate an entire literature review to those concepts alone, these concise definitions mentioned above serve for the purpose of my paper. I intend to use these concepts to explore the textual value statements on the SEC’s website. If the text invites multiple interpretations or reflects multiple values, it may be possible for more types of audiences to identify with the organization. However, the images on the website may affect (either positively or negatively) the rhetorical impact that the textual discourse holds. Therefore, I will analyze which of the values in the text are reflected, if at all, in the images on the same page and determine whether that phenomenon enhances the overall discourse on the website.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The SEC website is a rich artifact due to the organization’s organic origins, longevity, and its emphasis on issues pertaining to the local environment. This case will expand the study of visual rhetoric: little has been said about the intersection of visual and verbal text on websites. Theoretically, there is a need to explore the visual and textual rhetoric on the website of the SEC to provide further insight for communication scholars as to how visual arguments may enhance, neutralize, or detract from the textual discourse. Not only will my analysis provide a very distinctive case study for rhetorical theorists, it will also provide the SEC with useful feedback on the persuasive power of the imagery on its website and provide practical suggestions as to how website designers can better negotiate the consistency of visual and verbal text on websites.

It is the nature of websites, and the SEC’s is no exception, that visual elements and text are displayed side by side, prominently noticeable to any visitors to the website. The blocks of text and visual elements on the SEC website relate together to create an impression for the visitor. Considering this interplay, the question arises: do the visual elements used on the SEC website reinforce or support the value statements found in the textual discourse? With the above rhetorical and organizational context in mind, I am seeking to answer the following questions:

- How, if at all, has the interaction of verbal and visual rhetoric been used to express the SEC’s values to the public, as reflected on the website of the SEC?
- Does the visual imagery found on the website enhance the textual discourse found on the SEC’s website? If so, how?
- If not, why, and how can these rhetorical strategies be improved?

To explore these questions, I analyze the webpages of the Swan Ecosystem Center to investigate and identify the interplay between the visual rhetoric and the verbal discourse
of the organization. I return to Foss’ (2004) broad framework of nature, function, and evaluation. Below, I will first describe the nature (Foss, 2004), the basic characteristics of the visuals found on the SEC website. These include establishing the immediate visual and verbal context (Birdsell and Groark, 1996), positive images and text (Hill, 2004), any vivid visual elements in the image (Hill, 2004; Richards and David, 2005), and how up-to-date the imagery appears to be (Bunz, 2001). Then, I will assess the function (Foss, 2004) of both the text and images by determining the rhetorical purpose of the text (i.e. to inform, to persuade) and the possible values emerging from the text. I will then assess the potential messages present in the images in the context of the values I have already found in the text. I will evaluate (Foss, 2004) the textual messages through the framework of polyseme, polyvalence, and multivalence. I then determine that the images enhance some aspects of the textual discourse by making the values more material through the use of images, and therefore more poignant. However, by emphasizing certain value statements found in the text, other value statements are relegated to only textual expression, possibly decreasing the full expression of those values in the discourse.
THE SWAN ECOSYSTEM CENTER WEBSITE

There are, in total, seventeen pages found on the Swan Ecosystem Center website, including: Bear Aware, Celebrate the Swan Race, Contact Us, Current Trail Conditions, Donations, Education, Events, Gift Shop, In the News, Landscape Assessment, Oral Histories and Resource Center, Stewardship, Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest, Trails, Exhibits & Visitors’ Info, Volunteers, Water Quality, and Home. Eleven of the seventeen pages (Bear Aware, Education, Gift Shop, Landscape Assessment, Oral Histories and Resource Center, Stewardship, Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest, Trails, Exhibits & Visitors’ Info, Volunteers, Water Quality, and Home) contain both photos and text. Of the eleven pages that have photos, six contained pictures where the complete image was viewable at the top of the page (without having to scroll down to view the entire image). For the purposes of my study, I consider only these pages that contain both text and images.

There are several visual and textual elements common to all of the pages on the website. There is a navigation bar running down the left side of the page. This bar includes seventeen links to the different pages mentioned above, arranged in alphabetical order by title, with the exception of the Home page, which is last in the list. There is static organizational contact information (name, physical address, telephone number, and email address) below the links. This navigation bar is consistent on each page throughout the site. The background of all the pages is off-white in color with a pattern of very light grey animal tracks, including tracks of elk, deer, mountain lion, wolves, grizzly bear, various smaller animals, and humans. The SEC logo and motto, “Respecting each other. Sustaining the land” are in the upper left of the page. The logo consists of the
name of the organization, Swan Ecosystem Center, but the “S” in “Swan” is shaped distinctly like a swan, with a slash coming out of the lower curve of the “S” to signify a wing (see Appendix B). Both the background and the logo/motto remain consistent on all the pages on the website. The amount of text appears to outweigh the number of images on all eleven pages on the SEC website, exceptions being the Gift Shop and Volunteers pages. Below follows a description of each page that contains both images and text.

**Home**

There are four links at the top of the homepage, leading to events, a photo contest, and a newsletter. Below the links and the SEC logo is text describing the vision, the SEC, the mission, partnerships, and the Swan Valley ecosystem. There are two images interspersed within the text. In the first image, there are several small children, dressed for the cold, looking at someone holding a cluster of pine needles. This picture is on the right side of the page and can be seen immediately when the page loads. To the left of the picture of the children is a section of text titled “Our vision: the Swan Valley in 50 years.” The text describes the environmental and social conditions the SEC is striving towards. Specifically, that “people learn and work together to ensure that the ecosystem’s resources are protected, responsibly used and available for all future generations” (SEC, 2008). The students are dressed in brightly colored winter coats and a few of them are holding pine needle fronds, echoing the hand of the adult in the picture.

Directly underneath the image of the children is a paragraph describing the SEC itself, stating that “people with diverse perspectives learn about the watershed and are involved in land management on public and private land. SEC helps people work together
to sustain the valley's natural resources and rural and wild characteristics” (SEC, 2008). Immediately below the description of the SEC are two other paragraphs describing the organization’s mission and the partnership the SEC has with the Forest Service, through the SEC’s use of the Condon Work Center and providing information to citizens on the ground. The next section of text contains a description of the ecosystem found in the Swan Valley. The text mentions specifically the richness, diversity, and existence of rare, threatened, and endangered species of flora and fauna found in the area. This section of text also explains the human influence on the land and the land ownership patterns on the landscape. Embedded within this section of text is the second image, a picture of a snow-capped mountain range, taken from afar on a blue-sky day. In the foreground of this picture is a forest leading up to the mountains, reflecting a landscape seemingly absent of human influence.

**Bear Aware**

There are four images on the Bear Aware page of the website. The first image, visible immediately at the top of the page, is a photograph. In the center of the photograph is a garbage container, flanked by two grizzly bears. Both of the bears are on hind legs, with forepaws on the top of the container. They are attempting to get inside the container, but the caption explains that it is bearproof. Immediately to the left and below the bear image is text explaining the how human/bear interactions occur and tips for minimizing those contacts. Immediately below the text is a poster image titled “$10,000 REWARD” that offers contact information for the poaching of bears in the Swan Valley. At the bottom of the image are the decals representing Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; the United States Forest Service; Defenders of Wildlife; Plum Creek
Timber Company; and Montana Department of Natural Resources Conservation.

Directly below the reward poster are two images of damage that bears have committed to a cabin (by breaking in) and to a dumpster (by overturning it). These appear to be the most negative images on the entire site: both of the images show the destruction that bears can cause when interacting with human property. Below these images are text and links further offering resources and advice explaining ways to coexist with bears and other wildlife.

Education

On the Education page of the website, there are three images imbedded within text. At the top of the page is a portion of text explaining that the “Swan Ecosystem Center's outdoor and classroom programs engage families, students, teachers, parents, retirees, foresters, and loggers in ecosystem study” (Swan Ecosystem Center, 2008). Scrolling down the page allows the viewer to find descriptions of the programs that the SEC runs, including: school field trips and youth and family programs throughout the year, the importance of students observing the ecosystem to learn, an after school program where students participate in outdoor activities once a week, and an educational trunk, Students on the Land, that allows students to learn and participate in forest stewardship activities. All of the pictures on this page are of students in an outdoor learning setting. The first picture is a group of students sitting on the ground around a white bucket, looking for macroinvertebrates to study. The second is four students working in an insectary. The final picture shows four students sitting in a group, two with clipboard and pencils and the other two working with small tools.
Gift Shop

There are five pictures adorning the Gift Shop page of the website. The first is viewable immediately when the page downloads and is a colorful image of a variety of books on the history of the Swan Valley area and outdoor topics. The other pictures are of the products that the SEC sells, many of which are made by local artists. These pictures show sun catchers made out of stained glass, t-shirts, pottery, and bear reliefs made of copper. Beside each picture is a small blurb of text explaining what the product is. The text also advertises other products not shown in the images, including other types of clothing (besides t-shirts), Audubon plush birds, and bear spray. Additionally, this page advertises the sale of the Swan Valley Landscape Assessment and oral histories of Swan Valley residents.

Landscape Assessment

The Landscape Assessment page has one photograph: a picture of a stream with healthy vegetation along the bank, including trees and brush. The sky is blue. There is a dead log leaning into the stream. To the left and below this picture is text explaining that an SEC committee representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders worked to develop “an assessment of the Upper Swan Valley landscape, taking into account both the ecological and social functions of the ecosystem” (Swan Ecosystem Center, 2008). The text also asserts that this assessment will be a useful tool to “help the public, federal and state land managers, the timber industry, and private landowners better care for the land” (Swan Ecosystem Center, 2008). Below the picture and the text are links to the chapters of the assessment in PDF format so the visitor to the page can download and read through the entire document.
Oral Histories and Resource Center

On the Oral Histories and Resource Center page, there is one picture and some text. At the very top of the page is an explanation of the oral histories project that a local reporter is spearheading with the help of volunteers and students. Below and to the left of the explanation of the project is an excerpt from one of the summaries of the interviews of a woman named Gyda Monrad Newman. There is a picture of Gyda to the right of the excerpt. She is wearing a red plaid shirt and holding the lead rope of a horse. She and the horse are standing in a pasture, with an old wooden fence and trees in the background. Below the picture is a description of the resource center available to the public for researching the history of the Swan Valley.

Stewardship

There are five images on the Stewardship page of the website. At the very top of the page, there is a small paragraph titled Forest Stewardship. Directly beneath that paragraph is another paragraph describing the private lands fuels mitigation projects in the Swan Valley, and ways to obtain funding to execute fuels mitigation projects. Below the first two paragraphs, there are two pictures. The pictures, placed side by side, show a section of forest before a fuels mitigation project and during a fuels mitigation project. Below the pictures are text and a link to a survey about Forest Service/public information exchange. The next section of text, titled “Mission Mountains and Swan Range Program” explains how SEC facilitates information exchange and care of the Mission Mountains and the Swan Range. This text is flanked on three sides (left, right, and below) by pictures of two recreation managers and a picture of small children cleaning a nature trail.
Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest

There are four images on the Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest page. At the top of the page, there are three paragraphs of text explaining the Swan Valley Conservation Strategy, the Elk Creek Conservation Area, and the Elk Creek Management Plan. All of these paragraphs address conservation strategies that are being used in the valley. Directly below these chunks of text is a picture of the proposed Elk Creek Conservation Area, with sections of land brightly colored, designating different land ownership. Below that illustration is a section of text explaining the history of and players involved in the Elk Creek Conservation Area. Embedded within the historical explanation is a picture of the creek and a picture of bull trout, an endangered species of fish found in the creek. Below that is a large map of the entire Swan Valley that designates land ownership throughout the valley and indicates where the Elk Creek Conservation Area is in the larger landscape. Below that picture are links to the different chapters of the Elk Creek Management Plan.

Trails, Exhibits & Visitors’ Info

Three pictures can be found on the Trails, Exhibits & Visitors’ Info page, which complement the three main sections of text on the page. The first and second sections of text explain the two demonstration forests that visitors have access to, the first of which is a Ponderosa Pine Site. The picture embedded within this text is that of firefighters working within a burn area. The second section of text describes another demonstration forest, the Firewise Forest. The picture within this section of text is that of a healthy ponderosa pine forest, with green grass growing underneath the trees. The third picture shows three people intently studying an exhibit display in the forest. To the left of this
picture is a third main section of text describing the displays and exhibits found in and around the visitor’s center.

Volunteers

Two pictures grace the Volunteers page of the SEC website. The size of the pictures and the sections of text seem to balance each other out. The first picture is on the right side of the page, and shows two people wielding tools on a patch of ground in the forest. To the left of this picture is a relatively small paragraph explaining the significance of volunteers to the SEC and the various capacities in which they serve. Below that paragraph is a picture of students clustered around a computer, most likely entering data into a database. To the right of that picture are two short sentences: “Volunteers contribute 6,500 hours of labor annually. For more information contact our office” (SEC, 2008).

Water Quality

Six pictures are found on the Water Quality page of the SEC website, embedded throughout the text on the page. The first section of text describes the water resources found throughout the valley. Below that text is a picture of a pond or calm river in the fall with a larch forest in the fall. From the shadows, it appears that the photo was taken in early evening light, and the larch forest is reflecting off the water. Immediately below the picture is a description of the Swan River as being a habitat for bull trout. The next section of the page is titled “Water Quality Celebration 2007.” There are two pictures with captions in this section. The pictures show people at the Water Quality Celebration learning about water health. Beneath those two pictures are three sections of text describing problems facing the watershed, a technical advisory group that has been
organized to confront those problems, and strategies that are used to monitor and restore
parts of the watershed. To the left of the section on monitoring and restoration is a
picture of a lake surrounded by forested mountains. The text on monitoring and
restoration extends well below the picture. Below the monitoring and restoration text is a
section of text titled “State of the Swan” describing a report of water monitoring
compiled from different land owners. To the right of the text is a picture of people
looking at informational exhibits in the outdoors. The next section of text is titled “How
you can help protect water quality” and lists tips and suggestions for maintaining the
health of water in the valley. Finally, the last section on this page is a picture of two
students sitting on the bank of a river in waders. One of the students is holding chemistry
apparatus. To the right of the picture is a section titled “Learning by Observing;
monitoring by students” which describes how students in the valley contribute to water
quality monitoring throughout the valley.

Visually and verbally, all of the webpages have both text and images on them,
with a tendency for the images to be interspersed throughout the text. I claim that the
images are distributed throughout the text because, in most cases, the amount of text far
outweighs the number of images on the page. Again, the major exception to this is the
Gift Shop page. Additionally, the Volunteers page has what appears to be an equal
amount of text and images. Also in most cases, with the exception of the two images (of
damages caused by bears) on the Bear Aware page, the images have positive
connotations, showing beautiful landscapes, wildlife, or happy people in a natural setting
with bright colors. However, many of the images are not up to date: I have been
accessing this website for nearly two years, and many of the images have not changed in
that time. All of these elements make up the *nature* (Foss, 2004) of the website. Having investigated the nature of my artifact, I now move on to explicating the rhetorical function of the text, the value statements within the text, and discovering if any of those value statements are reflected in the images on that webpage.
FINDING PURPOSE AND VALUES IN THE TEXT AND ON THE INTERNET

Before examining the function of each page on the SEC website, I will discuss the two elements common to all pages on the website: the logo/motto and the background, both of which work together to create the value statement that the Swan Valley ecosystem and people are important. I justify analyzing these elements together because they are common to, and remain consistent on, all of the pages on the SEC site. First, the name itself, “Swan Ecosystem Center” implies that the concept of an “ecosystem” perspective is a priority to the organization and its functions. Rather than labeling itself “Swan Valley Clearinghouse,” or some other, more possibly neutral name (which would imply that it is merely an information repository for parties interested in Swan Valley natural resource issues), the organization has asserted its underlying value statement through its name: ecosystem is important. The background image of animal tracks supports this view: the presence of all types of animal tracks, predators, birds, and smaller animals included, even barefoot human footprints, implies all parts of the ecosystem are important.

Second, the motto “Respecting each other. Sustaining the land” asserts two value statements. The first value, coming from the first statement, is that people are important. The organization does not set itself apart as its own entity with this statement; indeed, the use of “each other” implies that all people in the valley are important enough to be respected. The second value statement can be determined to be that the environment is important. If people are acting together to sustain the land, they care about the environment, making the environment itself important. Third, the “S,” shaped like a swan, creates an image for the Swan Valley, reinforcing the concept of the local identity.
by reminding the viewer of the wildlife from which the valley got its name. In this sense, the value statement emerging from the logo/motto and background combined is that the Swan Valley ecosystem and people are important.

Home

The primary rhetorical purpose of the text on the homepage is to inform, to teach website visitors about the SEC and the Swan Valley ecosystem. The second, third, and fourth major pieces of text on the webpage inform about the SEC itself, how it works and operates within the valley. The second block of text describes the SEC’s function within the valley. This text states that “Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) is a nonprofit community group in the Swan Valley of northwestern Montana. People with diverse perspectives learn about the watershed and are involved in land management on public and private land. SEC helps people work together to sustain the valley's natural resources and rural and wild characteristics” (SEC, 2008). In this case, the text informs the visitor to the website of what the main purpose of the organization is.

Additionally, the text informs the visitor as to what the SEC does. An example of this is the SEC’s partnership with the Forest Service. The texts states that the “Swan Ecosystem Center has an office and visitor center in the U.S. Forest Service Condon Work Center. SEC helps the Forest Service continue an on-the-ground presence in the Swan Valley, enabling residents and visitors to connect with Flathead National Forest managers. Staff and volunteers provide information about wildlife, land stewardship, trails and recreation” (SEC, 2008). Not only does the SEC work with the Forest Service, but it connects others to the Forest Service. Additionally, the SEC tasks itself with serving as a clearinghouse of information to multiple parties on multiple subjects.
Finally, the text informs a website visitor about the Swan Valley ecosystem. The tone of this section is matter of fact: the text places the Swan Valley within the larger context of North American ecosystems and describes the flora and fauna found in the valley. Additionally, it mentions the human influence on the land and the complexities of the land ownership patterns in the valley. All of this serves to give the website visitor an overview of the ecosystem found in the valley.

However, although the text serves primarily as an informative resource for the visitor to the website, the text on the homepages also serves to express the values of the organization. Specifically, the values of *community and social diversity*, *ecosystem diversity*, *importance of using and sustaining the environment*, and the *importance of learning* are major themes running throughout the text on the homepage. The Swan Valley is a place where “people and a natural diversity of plant and animal species thrive” and “people with diverse perspectives learn about the watershed and are involved in land management.” The ecosystem’s resources should be “protected” “used” “available” and be maintained through “sustainable use and care.” Throughout the first four sections of text, the phrases “learn and work together” “partnership” and “connect with” are found five times.

For example, in the section titled Vision, the text states that “The Swan Valley is rural and wild. It is a rich environment where people and a natural diversity of native plant and animal species thrive. People learn and work together to ensure that the ecosystem’s resources are protected, responsibly used and available for all future generations” (SEC, 2008). This statement immediately informs the visitor to the site that of the SEC’s vision of the valley’s future.
In the context of the messages already found in the text, the first image on the homepage reflects the value of the learning is important. The children in the image are engaged and happy. They are clearly learning about some part of the ecosystem and seem to be enjoying their experience. Therefore, learning is an important activity in the context of the SEC.

The picture of the mountain range serves to demonstrate what the ecosystem in the Swan Valley looks like. It serves as support, or documentation, to demonstrate exactly what the surrounding text is saying. Different viewers, however, may appreciate the picture simply for its beauty, but this picture does not discernibly reflect any of the textual value statements already found on the homepage.

Bear Aware

The primary purpose of the text on the Bear Aware page is to inform the audience of bear/human interaction, why that interaction may occur, and what can be done to mitigate or avoid those situations. For example, the text informs the visitor that “the Bear Aware project helps people avoid conflicts with bears and other wildlife” (SEC, 2008). The page continues with this message by displaying hints and other resources for the visitor to learn more about this subject.

However, the text also contains elements of persuasion, specifically placing responsibility on humans for creating circumstances that encourage human/bear interactions. For example, the text states that “when bears find pet food, stock food, garbage, bird feed, fruit or compost in your yard, they quickly learn to return for more rewards. Bears that have become accustomed to humans usually are killed as a result of our carelessness” (SEC, 2008). From these sentences, it is clear that humans can be
largely responsible for leaving attractants where bears can access them next to their homes. This can create conflicts (such as property damage) or create bears that are tolerant to human presence. The responsibility for this is placed clearly and squarely on humans: “bears that have become accustomed to humans usually are killed as a result of our carelessness” (SEC, 2008). Human carelessness is a cause of bears dying. Those careless habits could be changed and bears could be saved if that were to happen. This section of text has clearly established the exigency of the situation. The next section of text offers a solution for people who want to prevent bears from being killed. The SEC writes, “Let’s do our part to protect bears and our families by following a few simple rules” (SEC, 2008) and continues on to state those habits that can be changed to help save the bears. Through a closer reading of these sections of text, we can discern the values that the SEC holds: the bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem and that it is important for humans to work at coexisting with the wildlife in the area.

Wildlife, specifically bears, are important parts of the ecosystem. In and of itself, having a page dedicated solely to improving bear/human interactions shows the importance this subject is for the SEC. Additionally, the text at the bottom of the page states that “Our Swan Valley Bear Newsletter is published each spring and fall, offering tips for preventing human and bear conflicts and providing up to date information about bear research and local bears” (SEC, 2008). In maintaining this newsletter twice a year, the SEC continues to show the importance that bears hold in the ecosystem within the valley. Further, the text also expresses the importance of humans coexisting with wildlife. The tips and hints that are offered serve to show the importance of this value to the SEC. On the bottom of the page the SEC writes “stop in at our office to review
videos and pick up literature that will help you coexist with wildlife” (2008). Throughout the text, the SEC puts the responsibility on humans to work towards creating a balance in living with wildlife.

The first three images on the Bear Aware page serve mainly as visual evidence to support the surrounding text. The first image of the two bears struggling to get into a bear-proof garbage container serves to support the claim that garbage is an attractant for bears and that bear-proof containers are an effective means at preventing bears from getting to the tasty garbage inside. The second and third images show the aftermath of a bear violating human property in the search for food. These pictures serve as visual proof and support the exigency of the situation as it was established in the text: bears do break in and damage human property.

The fourth image, the “wanted” poster, is drastically different from the other three images on the page and expresses the value that bears are important to the ecosystem. By equating $10,000 to receiving information “leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the illegal killing of any grizzly bears in the Swan/Seeley valley,” the poster expresses how valuable bears are to the ecosystem. The poster expresses even more forcefully the importance bears have to the organizations whose decals can be found on the poster.

Education

The primary purpose of the text on the education page is to inform visitors to the website of the educational programs that the SEC sponsors. The text describes each of the programs, explaining when and how the program is available to students. Reflected in this text, however, are the values of community is important and that learning is
important. At the very top of the page, the SEC writes that the “Swan Ecosystem Center's outdoor and classroom programs engage families, students, teachers, parents, retirees, foresters, and loggers in ecosystem study” (2008). Because the programs engage all types of people, these programs reinforce a sense of community, across the spectrum of community members, even though the community members may hold divergent views. Additionally, the SEC’s “programs for youth and adults incorporate natural resource specialists from around the Northwest as well as the expertise of local residents” (SEC, 2008). Incorporating “the expertise of local residents” implies a sense of respect for local, on-the-ground knowledge, which further reinforces a sense of community. Finally, the SEC writes that “Learning together is fun and it helps us become better land stewards” (SEC, 2008). Not only does the SEC assert that learning is fun, but the organization implies that learning is important because it increases the level of stewardship.

All three of the images on the education page serve as supporting evidence for the descriptions of the programs: they show the students learning outside, in the field. All of the students are performing hands-on activity, as stated in the text, whether looking at macroinvertebrates or working with forestry tools. In every one of the pictures, the students appear to be deeply engaged in their learning experience, insinuating that learning is fun and worthwhile, which closely equates to the textual value of learning is important.

Gift Shop

The primary purpose of the text on the Gift Shop page is to describe the items available for purchase from the gift shop found in the SEC visitor’s center. This page
informs the visitor as to the items they could purchase and browse while at the visitor’s center. Again, the images serve as support for the claims found in the text. The images on this page serve to demonstrate exactly what the items look like. Each picture has a corresponding description, both which match up to each other very well. Ultimately, these images, more so than images on any other pages on the website, serve to inform the visitor with no discernable persuasive message other than to convince the viewer that the items are worth buying. There are no major values of the organization expressed through the text or the images on this page, because the purpose of both is to demonstrate the retail that is available in the gift shop of the SEC.

**Landscape Assessment**

The primary purpose of the text on the Landscape Assessment page is to inform the visitor as to the process and purpose of the Landscape Assessment and makes the Landscape Assessment available to the visitor. The webpage states that “A Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) committee representing a broad spectrum of the community developed an assessment of the Upper Swan Valley landscape, taking into account both the ecological and social functions of the ecosystem” (SEC, 2008). The Landscape Assessment, then, was based on community collaboration, scientific, and social evidence. The values reflected in this text are that *community is important* and the *sustaining the environment is important*. According to the SEC, “this community-based landscape assessment crosses all land ownerships for an ecosystem view. The assessment will help the public, federal and state land managers, the timber industry, and private landowners better care for the land” (2008). Again, the SEC repeats the term “community,” emphasizing that *community is important* in the discourse. Further, the terms “ecosystem
“view” and “better care for the land” highlight that sustaining the environment is important.

The purpose of the image on the Landscape Assessment page is apparently to serve as an example of a landscape found in the Swan Valley. In showing a healthy riparian habitat, the picture manifests a feeling of beauty within the viewer. However, the image does not reinforce the textual value statements on the page to a noticeable degree.

Oral Histories and Resource Center

The purpose of the text on the Oral Histories and Resource Center webpage is to inform the visitor about resources available for investigating the history of the Swan Valley. The text states that oral histories are being compiled and that summaries of the oral histories can be obtained. Further, the text informs the visitor that the SEC has a resource center available to the public for researching the Swan Valley’s history. Additionally, however, there are values of it is important for humans to coexist with the environment, community is important and it is important to use and sustain the environment/ecosystem present in the text. The webpage states that “longtime residents retain a wealth of information. They can tell us how people have lived within the ecosystem over time. Their stories are not only entertaining, they provide clues as to how we can both use and protect our forests, wildlife, water and a rural way of life” (SEC, 2008). The concept of living within the ecosystem over time emphasizes that it is important to coexist with the environment. Interviewing and recording the stories of “longtime residents” of the Swan Valley indicates that gathering information from community members is an important tool for resource management. This stresses the
value of community. Additionally, by using the stories as “clues as to how we can both use and protect our forests, wildlife, water and a rural way of life,” the SEC stresses the importance of the environment.

The image on the Oral Histories and Resource Center page functions to show an example of one of the “longtime residents” of the Swan Valley who was interviewed for the Oral Histories project. It serves as material evidence that there are people who were interviewed. However, this image demonstrates the value of community is important and it is important for humans to coexist with the environment. Showing a woman that was interviewed reinforces the concept that “longtime residents” are valued, which reflects the value of community is important. Additionally, the picture shows the woman in a mostly natural setting. Even though there is a fence behind her, it is constructed of wood, which is a naturally occurring material. She is leading a horse, which situates her even more in a natural setting, because she is interacting with an animal. This invokes the idea that she seems to coexist with the environment that surrounds her and reinforces that value.

**Stewardship**

The purpose of the text on the Stewardship page is primarily to inform the visitor about private fuels mitigation projects and strategies for the private landowner to obtain funding for fuels mitigation on their land. The first three sections of text approach these subjects in a matter-of-fact tone. Additionally, the Stewardship page informs about other Stewardship strategies that the SEC is involved with, including recreation management in the Swan Valley area forests. However, the text on this page also expresses the values that community is important and the ecosystem is important. At the very top of the page,
the SEC writes that “these projects are designed to sustain ecological processes and provide economic benefit to landowners and the community” (2008). In sustaining ecological processes, the landowners are buying into the value statement that *the environment is important*, and the SEC facilitating funding for those landowners reinforces the SEC’s commitment to the *importance of the environment*. Additionally, by stating that the community and landowners receive economic benefit, the SEC is asserting that not only is the environment being helped, but the community is being helped, as well. This reinforces the value that the *community is important*.

The images on the Stewardship page serve primarily as visual evidence for the information provided in the text. The first two pictures show the difference that a fuels mitigation project can have on a section of forest. The next two pictures show who the recreation managers are. The third image, in context with the heading above it, “Pathfinders Clear Nature Trail in the Swan Valley” (SEC, 2008), can also be construed as documenting the surrounding text. The picture shows who the “pathfinders” are.

**Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest**

The purpose of the text on the Swan Lands & Elk Creek Forest page is to document the history and process of Elk Creek Conservation strategy and to show the current land ownership status of the Swan Valley. The majority of the page is taken up by a description of the history, acquisition, and management of the Elk Creek Conservation Area. The tone of this text is strictly informative. However, reflected in the text throughout the entire page is the value of that *the environment is important*, specifically the Elk Creek area. Because the SEC has taken steps to protect this particular area, and has dedicated an entire page to the subject, it shows the importance of this area.
of the Swan Valley. More specifically, the SEC states that “Swan Ecosystem Center is working to protect the vital fish and wildlife habitat, forest resources and public access on these sections of Elk Creek” (SEC, 2008).

The images on this page serve to support the claims the text makes and serve as visual evidence. The maps that show the land ownership patterns situate the viewer in the physical context of the Swan Valley. The picture of the stream and the picture of the bull trout orient the viewer to what the ecosystem is looks like and what the endangered fish look like. These pictures document the assertions in the text. However, it is difficult to draw values found in the text out of these pictures.

**Trails, Exhibits & Visitors’ Info**

The purpose of the text on this page is primarily to inform the visitor to the website of the learning opportunities and resources available to the visitor at the physical location of the SEC. The text reflects the value that *learning about the ecosystem is important*. There are two “demonstration forests” in which the visitor can learn about how forest ecosystems function and are managed. The SEC visitors’ center is a repository for more learning opportunities, from recreation to wildlife to more knowledge about the ecosystem. In maintaining these resources and advertising them on their website, the SEC is endorsing the value of the *learning about the ecosystem is important*.

The primary purpose of the images on this page is to serve as visual evidence for the learning resources that are available. Two of the pictures show the demonstration forests which are mentioned in the text. The third picture shows people reading an exhibit sign. This picture supports the fact that people visit and learn at the exhibits and therefore reinforces the value of *learning about the ecosystem is important*.
Volunteers

The purpose of the text on the Volunteers page is mainly to inform of the important place that volunteers hold in the SEC. The text, however, also asserts the value that *community is important*. The SEC writes that “volunteers serve on committees, help with educational programs, and participate in monitoring activities that integrate scholarship with local knowledge and create opportunities for interaction among agencies, industry, universities and the public” (2008). In speaking of “local knowledge,” the SEC implies that the community is an important aspect in the planning process.

The images on this page serve to show two activities volunteers engage in to help the SEC. These images serve mainly as evidence that volunteers are helping the SEC out in the field and demonstrate what the volunteers can do. These pictures do not discernibly echo any of the values found on the webpage.

Water Quality

The text on the Water Quality page primarily informs the website visitor of the many factors affecting watershed health in the Swan Valley and what residents and land managers are doing to improve and maintain the health of the water. Generally, the tone of the text is descriptive on this page, highlighting what people have already done to improve watershed health. However, one portion of the text is persuasive, describing “how you can help protect water quality” (SEC, 2008). This section offers guidelines for the website visitor to abide by to do their part in improving water quality. The statements, such as “Leave wetlands intact. Resist modifying wetlands to make ponds or meadows” (SEC, 2008) are directive to the reader. The values reflected in this text are
that the environment is important and community is important. The actions that have been taken to protect water quality and the hints that are offered to the reader imply that the water in the Swan Valley is an important resource that should be protected.

Additionally, the text highlights the fact that local students monitor the health of water throughout the Swan Valley. This indicates that the community, not just natural resource organizations, is involved in maintaining and protecting water quality. Highlighting the students in the text also emphasizes the value that learning about the ecosystem is important.

The images on the Water Quality page serve to give visual evidence to the reader what the text states outright. The images show beautiful, healthy streams and people at exhibits learning about water health. In the context of the messages in the text, the value that can be drawn from the pictures is that learning about the ecosystem is important.

The pictures of the people at the Water Quality Celebration reflect the value statement that learning is important. They have all gathered to learn more about water health in the Swan Valley. The picture of the students also implies that learning is important. Again, they are engaged and focused on learning about one aspect of their ecosystem.
AUDIENCE INTERPRETATION OF TEXTUAL VALUE STATEMENTS

The body of identifications (Burke, 1962) found on the SEC website consist of the value statements that emerged from the analysis above. First, the value that *the Swan Valley ecosystem and people are important* is expressed on every page of the website through the use of the logo/motto and background combined. The value statements expressed in the text on nearly every page of the website include: *community and social diversity is important, ecosystem diversity is desirable, it is important to use and sustain the environment, learning is important, and it is important to learn about the ecosystem.* Other value statements that are not as common are *bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem and it is important for humans to work at coexisting with the wildlife in the area.* Actual stakeholders, including the members of the public, the SEC, Forest Service, DNRC, MTFWP, USFWS, Plum Creek, Trust for Public Land, Montana Land Reliance, Vital Ground, Northwest Connections, Friends of the Wild Swan, and MTDEQ might interpret or value the above statements in different ways. It is useful, then, to investigate the way these stakeholders might respond to these value statements. Follows is my examination of how these values may appeal to different audiences found in the Swan Valley by employing the concepts of polyseme, polyvalence, and multivalence.

The first statement, *community is important,* is polysemic in that the stakeholders in the Swan Valley may give different meanings to that statement. The Forest Service and other land management organizations may perceive that statement as important because they are responsible for managing natural resources for multiple uses and must take the public into consideration when making decisions. In the case of the SEC and other organizations who are concerned with building relationships as part of their
everyday operations, this value statement could be evaluated in a very positive way. Most residents in the Swan Valley might also value this statement in a positive manner, because they may have grown up there or they may enjoy the people who live in the valley. This statement lends itself to being interpreted positively for a variety of different reasons.

The different stakeholders in the collaborative process in the Swan Valley may also value the statement *ecosystem diversity is desirable* positively for a variety of reasons, making that statement polysemic, as well. A stakeholder that considers land valuable for development, such as Plum Creek Timber Company, may consider that ecosystem diversity may increase the value of the land because wildlife may be a potential draw for certain investors. Another person from the community who hunts may consider ecosystem diversity important so he or she can hunt. Yet another may feel that ecosystem diversity is important because all living things have intrinsic value, and so on. In any case, the message is one that could appeal in a favorable way to multiple types of audiences found in the Swan Valley.

Another value statement, *learning is important*, can be considered polysemic. Many groups in the Swan Valley could value this statement in favorable ways for different reasons. The generality of this statement lends itself to being more agreeable in a variety of ways because it is open to each stakeholders’ interpretation of what is being learned. If an audience member can supply in his or her own head what the subject matter is, there may be a higher chance to that person to value this statement positively. When it comes right down to it, very few reasonable people would deny the simple statement that it is important to learn.
Another value statement, closely related to the one above, is that *it is important to learn about the ecosystem*. This statement is far more specific than the one above, giving voice to what is being learned. The statement is clear and could be interpreted in the same way by different audiences, but evaluated by those audiences in diverse ways, making this statement polyvalent. For example, the statement could be valued quite differently by stakeholders in favorable, neutral, or even unfavorable ways. Some stakeholders, such as the SEC itself, and other similarly oriented organizations, may feel that this statement is incredibly important. Others might react in a neutral manner: some may not care to learn about the ecosystem and may not even think about it. Yet others may react adversely to the statement: for one reason or another, those stakeholders may believe that learning about the ecosystem is not a priority or should not be undertaken. The potentially varying reactions to this statement could create conflict between or among certain parties involved in the Swan Valley collaborative efforts.

Yet another polyvalent statement, *bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem*, could possibly create even more diverse reactions within the audiences of the website. Again, those members who value the ecosystem perspective and/or place an intrinsic value on every thing in the ecosystem may react very positively to this statement. However, others may disagree very strongly with this statement for many reasons. If a person considers bears to be a threat to human safety or livelihood, that person may feel that it is important to eradicate bears from the ecosystem. In this way, the audiences in the Swan Valley might be sharply divided in the way that they evaluate this message.

The final polyvalent message, *it is important for humans to work at coexisting with the wildlife in the area*, might also create quite varied and extreme reactions within
audience members. There are people or organizations in the Swan Valley who might evaluate this message in a positive manner for a multitude of reasons. For example, they may believe that an ecosystem perspective requires that humans and wildlife merit equal space in the environment. However, there also may be people in the valley who may consider this statement to be offensive: they might believe that humans have precedence over wildlife and the ecosystem, due to manifest destiny, the almighty dollar, or some other such reason. There also may be entities in the valley who fall in between these two extremes, resulting in an array of evaluations for this particular value statement.

There is one textual message that may be considered multivalent: *it is important to use and sustain the environment*. The reader who takes into account the entire phrase may acknowledge contradicting values in the statement. The idea of using the environment and maintaining the environment all at one time expresses opposing values, creating a multivalent phrase. Generally, it would seem that if humans are using the environmental resources, it would be difficult to maintain those resources, as well. This creates in the reader cognitive dissonance that he or she would have to reconcile. Perhaps in resolving the resulting cognitive dissonance, the reader would come to the conclusion that “wise use” of the land would be an appropriate option.

The polysemic messages on the website may increase identification between different parties in the Swan Valley by acknowledging the common values that people in the valley hold. For the messages that are polysemic, it is possible for multiple stakeholders to evaluate these statements in positive ways for different reasons. Because they may react positively to the statement and agree with it, and another party may do the same (despite the differing reasons for the positive reaction), those particular statements
may create increased identification between/among parties who may not necessarily share the same value system. In this way, the SEC is expressing on their website the common ground that may help members of the valley work together.

At the same time, the use of polyvalent statements may actually decrease identification among the stakeholders. For the most part, the polyvalent messages can be interpreted in similar ways; however, the audience members may value the message differently depending on their personal interests and value system. One stakeholder may react to a certain statement in a positive manner while another stakeholder might react negatively, sparking controversy or highlighting differences in the value systems of the stakeholders. These value statements that create opposing reactions between/among parties may potentially decrease the level of identification between/among the stakeholders who view the website.

The polyvalent phrases, however, serve another purpose, to present to the audience those issues in the valley that create the most conflict among the stakeholders. In asserting value statements about those certain issues, the SEC acknowledges the sources of conflict that have arisen and remain between the stakeholders in the valley. The particular issues of contention are brought to the forefront by putting those value statements on the website. In essence, by asserting the organization’s view through the polyvalent phrases and introducing those issues that are sources of conflict in the valley, the SEC creates space for potential disagreement and dialogue, concepts that are essential to the open communication required throughout the collaborative process.

Taken together, the use of polysemonic phrases and polyvalent phrases on the SEC website is a productive practice for the SEC as a collaborative organization. Highlighting
the commonalities of the stakeholders in the valley (through the use of polysemic statements) while acknowledging the sources of conflict in the valley (in the polyvalent statements) are practices from which the SEC can begin and continue the collaborative process. The SEC’s use of polysemic words and phrases allow multiple audiences with differing values the possibility of connecting with, or encouraging identification with, the organization itself. At the same time, the SEC’s use of polyvalence creates an argumentative space for stakeholders to think about and assert their own opinions about those issues, and bring those issues to the forefront of discussion in the valley.

Establishing those issues as a continued source of discussion allows the collaborative process to maintain its momentum for both the SEC and the participants. Ultimately, using both polyseme and polyvalence in the text on the website asserts a common core of ideals from which all of the participants are able to work together, while simultaneously creating an argumentative space for them to begin (or continue) discussion about sources of conflict in the valley.
IMAGE VALUES AND INCREASING AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

The SEC uses imagery that repeats and reinforces some of those value statements found in the text. Specifically, the textual values found on the Homepage are community and social diversity is important, ecosystem diversity is important, it is important to use and sustain the environment, and that learning is important. The picture of children on the Homepage reflects the value that learning is important. On the Bear Aware page, the textual values are bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem and it is important for humans to work at coexisting with the wildlife in the area, while the “wanted” poster echoes the value that bears are important to the ecosystem. The textual values on the Education page are that community is important and that learning is important, while the pictures of students on the page reflect the value that learning is important. On the Oral Histories and Resource Center page, the text reflects the following value statements: it is important for humans to coexist with the environment, community is important and it is important to use and sustain the environment/ecosystem. The picture of the resident echoes the values that community is important and that it is important for humans to coexist with the environment. The textual value on the Trails, Exhibits, & Visitors Info page is that learning about the ecosystem is important and the picture of the people reading the exhibit sign reflects the same value. On the Water Quality page, the textual values are that the environment is important, learning is important, and community is important, and the pictures of the Water Quality Celebration reflect the value that learning about the ecosystem is important.

In sum, six images on different pages reflect at least one of the value statements expressed in the textual discourse on that respective page. Of those, two of those images
reinforce the textual value that learning is important (a polysemic message), and two others reinforce the value that learning about the ecosystem is important (a polyvalent message). One image echoes the value statement that bears are important to the ecosystem. Another image, on its own page, reinforces the textual discourse, but this image reflects two value statements rather than one: that community is important (a polysemic message) and it is important for humans to coexist with the environment (a polyvalent message). The value statement stating that the Swan Valley ecosystem and people are important, reflected in the motto/logo and background, is found on every page.

In essence, the images on the webpages are able to echo at least one message in the text, essentially adding additional rhetorical force to the value statement that is already present in the text. Not only does the viewer of the website receive value statements by reading the text, but the viewer also sees a visual of that value statement on the same page. This repetition and reinforcement strengthens the textual rhetorical messages by creating another layer to the discourse through the use of images. In the cases where the images do create another layer to the discourse, the image physically manifests the value found in the text. The images actually express the value in a more explicit way than does the text by creating a visual of that value.

However, the images on the pages often strongly reflect one value statement that is present in the text, while at the same time, the text on that page actually holds multiple value statements (See Appendix C). For example, on the homepage, the values that are expressed textually are: community is important, ecosystem diversity is important, it is important to use and sustain the environment, and learning is important. Considered
alone (without the value statements in the text), the image of the students could be very ambiguous and may present multiple meanings to multiple audiences. In conjunction with the text, however, the value statement that is reflected most strongly in that picture is that *learning is important*. In essence, the image is highlighting that particular value statement in favor of the other value statements in the text.

This phenomenon may be problematic in that those values which are left unexpressed in the visuals on the page may receive less rhetorical emphasis. Though an image may enhance one value statement, that image, by default, actually may overshadow the other value statements found in the text on that page. The overall discourse on the website could be degraded if one value is emphasized too much, and others, by default, are de-emphasized to the point where they fade into the background. The viewers may not receive those particular value statements as strongly, because those values are not reflected in the images as consistently. This phenomenon could impact the organization if some of its crucial values are relegated to the background consistently throughout the website.

More specifically, however, it is important to expand on the complexities of the images and the value statements which they reflect through the lens of polyseme and polyvalence. Some images reinforce polysemic statements while other images reinforce polyvalent messages. Exploring each of these separately is a useful exercise to discover the polysemic and polyvalent tendencies of the images on the website. In particular, in the images that reflect polysemic statements, I will look for which interpretation is emphasized most out of the possible multiple meanings. In the images that reflect polyvalent phrases, I will examine which evaluation, positive or negative, emerges most
strongly from those particular images.

There are three pages on which the pictures reflect polysemic messages from the surrounding text. The pictures of students (on two different pages) reflect the value that \emph{learning is important} and the picture of the longtime resident reflects the value that \emph{community is important}. As mentioned earlier, many different readers might interpret these value statements as important for many different reasons. However, the images reinforce certain interpretations of the value statements more strongly than others.

The images of the students do not necessarily reflect a specific audience’s interpretation of what is being learned, but the images support the idea, in positive ways, that learning is important. It is important to recall from my argument above that this textual value statement is very general, and most people would agree that learning is important. The pictures, then, emphasize the positive aspects of learning. The students seem to be happy or absorbed in their task, so the image emphasizes most strongly the interpretation that learning is fun and worthwhile whatever the subject matter may be. These images, then, put a positive spin on the value statement that \emph{learning is important}.

In the case of the picture of the longtime resident, the image emphasizes most strongly the idea of respect and building relationships. The image of an actual longtime resident of the valley shows the personal aspect of the valley and creates a visual of an appreciation for other people, especially a specific person who has intimate knowledge of the valley. Therefore, the interpretation of \emph{community is important} in the image matches closely with the SEC’s potential interpretation of the textual value, in that building relationships and respect is important to the collaborative process.

There are four pages on which the images reflect polyvalent messages from the
surrounding text. The picture of the people reading the exhibit sign and the pictures of the water quality celebration reinforce the value that learning about the ecosystem is important. The wanted poster echoes the value statement that bears are important to the ecosystem and the picture of the longtime resident reflects the value that it is important for humans to coexist with the environment. As mentioned in the section above, many different readers might evaluate the textual messages positively, negatively, neutrally, or on a spectrum in between. However, the images serve to strengthen a positive, rather than negative, evaluation for the value statements in the text.

The pictures of the people reading the exhibit sign and the pictures of the water quality celebration spark a positive reaction in relation to the textual values. All of the people are happy, they are outside on wonderful days, and learning about their ecosystem. The images serve as proof that people are taking their time to learn about the ecosystem and making that action seem positive. This reinforces in the viewer a more positive evaluation of the phrase that learning about the ecosystem is important.

The picture of the longtime resident also encourages a positive evaluation of the value statement it reflects. The picture is bright, the longtime resident is happy, and she seems content in her world of nature. Her picture gives the viewer the impression that living with nature is a good thing, and strengthens a positive reaction to the statement that it is important for humans to coexist with the environment.

Though the wanted poster does not necessarily encourage in the viewer happy feelings, it still promotes positive evaluations of the value statement that bears are important to the ecosystem. The poster highlights the monetary reward that a person would receive if that person reported a bear being killed. Most people might feel excited
at the prospect of receiving such a payment. Additionally, the sides of the image appear to be ragged and cut, like a wanted poster from the old times of the Wild West. Those times when adventure was the norm, and vigilante justice prevailed. These emotions, excitement and adventure, may spark a positive reaction within the viewer of the wanted poster.

It appears that the SEC uses both polyseme and polyvalence to their advantage as it is reflected in the images on their website. In the images that echo polysemic statements, those pictures favor an interpretation that is positive and geared toward the interests of the organization. For the images that reflect polyvalent statements, those images favor a positive evaluation of the message, rather than a neutral or negative evaluation. So, for the images that reflect value statements found in the text, those images seem to work for the organization in a productive manner. However, the images that do reflect textual value statements seem to be a small number, compared to all of the images that are found on the website. At this point, it may be useful for the organization to consider increasing the amount of images that reflect value statements found in the text, to encourage the audience to interpret a greater number of textual value statements in a positive manner.

It is important to note here that I have looked at the images on the webpages for their ability to repeat/reflect values that I have already found textually. I have not studied the images independently: I have chosen to use textual values as criteria for the values that may be found in the images on that respective webpage. This does not mean that other value statements are not reflected in the images, just that some value statements are reflected more forcefully than others, according to my interpretation. There may be
additional values or expressions that could be found in the images aside from the values that I have listed above. Therefore, a study emphasizing participant reactions to the text and images, or to the images alone, would enrich the analysis that I have already done and may perhaps expand the interpretations of the value statements found in the images.

Additionally, I have not addressed the issue of the images which, through my analysis, do not seem to reflect any of the value statements that the text expresses. Though these images do not seem to reflect organizational values, it does not mean that they do not affect the discourse at all or do not have some impact on the potential audience. The study of these images, then, is necessary to discover if they have an impact on the discourse.

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to shed some light on the rhetorical interplay between the visual and verbal texts found on the SEC website. For some visual elements, I have found that the images actually reinforce the textual discourse, making that discourse more poignant to the viewer. Emphasizing only certain value statements found in the text, however, seems to put less emphasis on other values that are found in the text but not expressed through images, which may impact the effectiveness the overall discourse has on the viewer. Whether polysemic or polyvalent, most of the images used on the website are positive, which may create more of a tendency for the viewer to connect with that value. By using images to add another layer to the textual discourse, the organization might increase viewer identification with the organization’s ideals than text alone might allow.
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

I have analyzed the interplay between the text and the visual rhetoric on the SEC website through the lenses of polyseme, polyvalence, and multivalence while making use of Burke’s concept of identification. It follows from my analysis that website designers should be attuned to the rhetorical choices they are making, both visually and verbally, on the websites they create. Further, they should be aware of the interplay between images and text, and take care to enhance the overall discourse on the site. Therefore, I have created *A guide for NPO website designers: Assessing organizational values, audience values, and how appropriate image use may enhance the textual messages on your website*, a guide and checklist for creating visual/verbal messages that strengthen the rhetorical messages on a website. This guide is especially geared toward place-based, grassroots organizations that work toward building awareness of environmental, multiparty issues.

The content areas I discuss in this guide include: 1) Organizational values—strategies for assessing organizational values through the organization’s mission statement and vision, 2) Audiences—a checklist for assessing the potential audiences that may visit a website and the values that they may hold, 3) Comparing organizational and audience values—strategies for assessing similarities between organizational values and audience values, 4) Values in images—strategies for assessing values in images, 5) How images impact the overall message—a guide for assessing the impacts the images may have on your value statements, and 6) Resources—a page that gives the website designer resources for further reading. I can envision this guide serving as preliminary applied tool to help nonprofit organizations improve the rhetorical messages on their websites, which
may allow for a variety of organizational improvements, from attracting potential grantors to recruiting volunteers.
CONCLUSION

The collaborative efforts in the Swan Valley of Montana have been studied in terms of the social and historical context (Cestero, 1997), chronicling the “highly social and political nature of community conservation initiatives and at least one community's attempt over time to recognize and work with these differences” (Cestero and Belsky, 2003, p. 167). From a highly polarized and contentious situation arose a collaborative organization that works towards the betterment of the surrounding environment and community. Over ten years after its creation, the SEC still exists and has “developed strong working relationships with all of the public agencies and other major decision makers in the Swan Valley” (Swan Valley Conservation, 2008). Through my rhetorical investigation of this organization’s website, I intended to reveal the complexities of textual and visual rhetoric that such an organization could encounter when designing its website. I have discovered that a nonprofit organization must structure its visual and textual rhetoric in such a way that it accurately conveys the correct message and impacts the appropriate audiences when they choose to visit the organization’s website. It is my hope that the SEC in particular, and other nonprofit organizations in general, can take away from this a better understanding of how their websites may be a more effective communication tool for them in their interactions with residents, the public, and other organizations.
References


Appendix A

Swan Valley Ownership & Conservation Status

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Land &amp; Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)</th>
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<td>Conservation easement completed</td>
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<td>Proposed acquisition</td>
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Ownership

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Base Layers

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<tr>
<td>Other Roads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streams</td>
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<tr>
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Source: Swan Valley Conservation website, “About Swan Valley” Tab
http://swanvalleyconservation.org/strategies.html
### Appendix C: Table of Values in Text and Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Webpage Name</th>
<th>Value Statements in Text</th>
<th>Message Type</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Value Statements Reflected in Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Homepage     | 1. *Community and social diversity is important*  
2. *Ecosystem diversity is important*  
3. *It is important to use and sustain the environment*  
4. *Learning is important* | Polysemic  
Polyvalent  
Multivalent  
Polysemic | Children Learning | 1. *learning is important* (Polysemic) |
| Bear Aware   | 1. *Bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem*  
2. *It is important for humans to work at coexisting with the wildlife in the area* | Polyvalent  
Polyvalent | Wanted Poster | 1. *bears are valuable parts of the ecosystem* (Polyvalent) |
| Education    | 1. *Community is important*  
2. *Learning is important* | Polysemic  
Polysemic | Students Learning | 1. *learning is important* (Polysemic) |
| Oral Histories and Resource Center | 1. *It is important for humans to coexist with the environment*  
2. *Community is important*  
3. *It is important to use and sustain the environment/ecosystem* | Polyvalent  
Polysemic  
Multivalent | Longtime Resident | 1. *it is important for humans to coexist with the environment* (Polyvalent)  
2. *community is important* (Polysemic) |
| Trails, Exhibits, & Visitors | 1. *Learning about the ecosystem is important* | Polyvalent | People Reading Exhibit Sign | 1. *Learning about the ecosystem is important* (Polyvalent) |
| Water Quality | 1. *Environment is important*  
2. *Learning about the ecosystem is important*  
3. *Community is important* | Polysemic  
Polyvalent  
Polysemic | Water Quality Celebration | 1. *Learning about the ecosystem is important* (Polyvalent) |
Appendix D:

A guide for NPO website designers: Assessing organizational values, audience values, and developing appropriate use of images

by Vailferree Brechtel

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Department of Communication Studies,
The University of Montana
Overview

For nonprofit organizations working on multi-party, natural resource issues, it is increasingly important to have a website that accurately communicates appropriate messages to the public, grantors, and other organizations. This guide is a product of my professional paper in which I analyzed the interplay between the text and the visual rhetoric on the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) website. In my paper, I analyzed the text for value statements and evaluated those accordingly by determining their ability to appeal to different audiences. I then analyzed the images on the website to determine which value statements were reflected in the images. I found that some, but not all, of the textual value statements on a webpage were reflected in the images. Accordingly, I determined that images have a capacity to increase audience identification with certain value statements by adding an extra layer to the rhetorical message. However, other value statements that are found in the text but not reflected in the images are de-emphasized.

Therefore, I have created this, A Guide for Non-profit Website Designers: Assessing organizational values, audience values, and developing appropriate use of images, a guide for creating visual/verbal messages that strengthen the rhetorical messages on a website. It is important that website designers should be attuned to the rhetorical choices they are making, both visually and verbally, on the websites they create. Further, they should be aware of the interplay between images and text, and take care to enhance the overall discourse on the site through the use of both of these elements.

Ultimately, I have created this guide as a supplement and addition to the literature that is already circulating for website designers: it is not meant to serve as a text on how to design websites, but as an additional resource for website designers to use in fine-tuning the rhetorical messages found in their text and images. This guide is especially geared toward place-based, grassroots organizations that work toward building awareness of environmental, multiparty issues.
Contents

Subject 1: Organizational values—strategies for assessing organizational values through the organization’s mission statement and vision.

Subject 2: Audiences—a checklist for assessing the potential audiences that may visit a website and the values that they may hold

Subject 3: Comparing organizational and audience values—strategies for assessing similarities between organizational values and audience values

Subject 4: Values in images—strategies for assessing values in images

Subject 5: How images impact the overall message—a guide for assessing the impacts the images may have on your value statements

Subject 6: Resources page—gives the website designer resources for further reading
ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Before embarking on the content of the images on the NPO’s website, it is important for you to have a firm grasp of the organization’s values, to more effectively express those values to the viewers of your website. Most likely, these values will be expressed through the mission statement and vision, which will have been composed before the construction of the website. It is possible that the mission and vision will reflect not one, but multiple value statements. In order to discover what those value statements are, you can survey the members of the organization or assess organization’s mission statement and vision. Either one of these strategies would be effective in assessing the organizational values, but a combination of both would be more thorough. Below, I describe ways to assess organizational values using both of these strategies.

1) Assess the values of the organization by surveying organizational members as to what they think are the values that most represent the organization.
2) Separately, examine the mission and vision for key words that may reflect concepts that may be important to the organization.
3) Ask yourself, “What is the organization saying in these statements that is important to them?”
4) Write the value statements down from your assessment of the mission statement. Compare those results to the survey conducted with organizational staff.
5) Compile the value statements from both strategies and take them to members of the organization to check if those value statements accurately reflect the values of the organization.

THE NPO’S AUDIENCES AND VALUES OF THOSE AUDIENCES

Audience analysis is a critical aspect of assessing what images to put on a website, especially for organizations with multi-party stakeholders. This is the first step for the website designer to become aware of the different perspectives that audiences may bring when they view your website. An effective strategy for assessing all the potential audiences is to list them and determine what values they may hold. Important questions to keep in mind during this phase of the process are “who may visit the website?” and “what ideals are important to them?” For each audience, it is important to discover what potential values they hold, so you can emphasize the similarities between the organization’s values and their values, or phrase the organization’s values in such a way that they can be valued by the other audiences. The following strategies can be employed for assessing potential values of each audience:

1) Look on other organizations’ websites and examine the text for value statements.
2) Interview members of a particular audience.

On the following page is a sample checklist for listing the potential audiences that may visit your website and space to list the values they may consider important.
# POTENTIAL AUDIENCE CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Audience</th>
<th>Potential Values of that Audience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potential grantors</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>Current volunteers</td>
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<td>Other organizations (for-profit)</td>
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<td>Other organizations (non-profit)</td>
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<td>Federal organizations</td>
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<td>State organizations</td>
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<td>Members of the public</td>
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<td>Members of the public</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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</table>
COMPARING ORGANIZATIONAL AND AUDIENCE VALUES

Having assessed the values of both the organization and the potential audiences who may view the website, it is important to explore where the commonalities are among the values. Potentially, you could appeal to some, all, or none of the audiences through the use of text and images. Ideally, the text on the website will reflect not only the organization’s values, but the values that some audiences hold, as well. Thus, when you choose which images to use, those images will reflect important value statements of the organization and other stakeholders and increase the overall impact of your message.

ASSESSING VALUES IN IMAGES

Having thoroughly assessed the values of your organization and the potential audiences, it is important to find images that reflect those values, particularly the values that are most important to your organization. Ideally, the images would also reflect the activities of the organization, as well, and therefore serve a dual purpose in communicating to your audience; not only would the images reinforce the value statements that are found in the text, but the images would also serve as material evidence for organizational activities. Following is a strategy for assessing the values present in an image, according to the value statements of your organization.

1) Have a list of the value statements you are expressing on your website.
2) Have a set of photographs that relate to the organization, showing organizational activities, members, places, and events.
3) Check to see if the key words in the value statements are reflected in what the image shows.

HOW IMAGES IMPACT THE OVERALL MESSAGE

When combined with the text on the website, the images that you have chosen may present a more powerful message in terms of the values of the organization, and hopefully will increase the appeal of those values to multiple audiences. However, the text on your webpage may reflect multiple value statements, while it is likely that the images only may reflect one or two of those values. If this is the case, the textual messages that are not reflected in the images on the page may fade into the background. If only one or two value statements are represented consistently in the images across the website, those value statements may have a stronger presence in the overall message. Therefore, it is important to be selective in the images that you choose: make sure you are emphasizing the values that the organization considers most important to its mission. Additionally, some images may echo values that may hold different meanings for different audiences. In those cases, be careful to emphasize meanings that are positive and relate to the overall mission of your organization. For images that reflect values that may create varying reactions among different audiences (negative and positive), try to use images that emphasize the positive aspect of that organizational value.
RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources for further reading on other communicative elements that may be useful for website designers.


Though geared toward a corporate organization audience, this article is useful in that it provides a checklist for streamlining media relations through a website.


This article explores the concept of multiple audiences in relation to the size of an organization, and investigates how those concepts impact the technical aspects of website design.


This article investigates effective techniques for increasing audience participation on websites through certain design features.


This article discusses the nuances of creating themes in technical documents through the use of images, specifically including the concepts of synecdoche and metonymy.