

〈Research Note〉

Branding a University and a Faculty: Seeking a Visual-identity Logo for GLOMAC

Asako IIDA

Abstract

This paper analyzes what visual symbols express the identity of a university. Referring to the history of emblems and seals in the U.K. and the U.S., the report considers branding awareness in Japan between the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, more universities are changing their emblems to corporate-like logos, demanding designs that are easier to understand on a smartphone than those with excessive information. However, some argue that the commercialization of university academics and branding is becoming more diverse and strategic. This study will examine what is expected from a university department logo, referring to a questionnaire taken from the students of GLOMAC, the Faculty of Global Management, Chuo University. In conclusion, we will discuss whether establishing the logo should be done cautiously.

Key Words

University emblems, logos, simplification, branding, visual identity

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1. Introduction

When one belongs to an organization, its symbolic colors, prototypical animal and flower motifs, and typographies are essential icons that enhance one's sense of belonging. In a larger framework, national flags, anthems, and symbols function to generate patriotism and the connection of citizenship. On the other hand, some strengthen the cohesion and affiliation of relatively small organizations based on personal experiences, such as emblems, seals, school colors, symbols, or even uniforms of the school one attended.

What visual would be best if we were to visualize the academism and branding of higher education in the name of a university? This research report examines whether the Faculty of Global Management

at Chuo University (GLOMAC), established in 2019, needs its faculty symbols such as logos. What is the conception, and what design would be appropriate if required? After an overview of the definition of emblems and logos and their branding and commercial roles, we will consider what elements are necessary for visualization in an institution of higher education.

2. School Emblems and Seals

The origin of school emblems and seals can be traced back to the medieval period in Europe. (Melewar & Akeel, 2005) Schools in the U.K. were often associated with religious institutions in the early education days, such as monasteries and cathedrals. These institutions used emblems and seals to represent their identity and authority.

Emblems are graphical or symbolic representations typically consisting of images or symbols associated with an organization, group, country, or individual. Complicated designs are possible since they convey a specific message or visual identity. Seals are similar to emblems, which had official and legal significance in history, serving as a mark of authenticity or authority. However, seals were devices or impressions usually made on wax, paper, or other materials, using engraved designs to authenticate documents, show authority, or mark ownership. Seals are designed in a circle, typically designed simpler than emblems.

Nevertheless, emblems and seals are often treated equally or even interchangeably, and in some cases, two different seals serve as the emblem of a university.

For example, the University of Notre Dame in the USA has two official seal versions¹⁾. One is a Latin seal, as they call it, which has limited applications such as contracts, stationery, lecterns, invitations, and academic diplomas; it is considered primarily for official use. To the right is the English seal, which allows a broader usage for merchandise and ceremonial communications. This paper will call seals a part of emblems and cover the concept to see the contrast between logos.

Oxford Dictionary of English (2006) defines the word “emblem” as a heraldic device or symbolic object as a distinctive badge of a nation, organization, or family,” it serves as a symbol of a particular quality concept. Thus, many emblems carry symbolic meanings related to the institution’s values, principles, or history. For religious schools, for example, an emblem might feature religious figures or symbols, and for other schools, it could be a coat of arms representing the school’s heritage or founders.

Emblems worked significantly to help distinguish one educational institution from another: they were used to represent the school’s name or patron saint visually. They were used as seals to validate official documents, certificates, and charters issued by the school or its governing body. It could be considered a thing for authentication. Over time, as educational institutions evolved and expanded, emblems became more widespread. The tradition of incorporating emblems into the design of school uniforms, badges, and other materials continued, even as schools became more secularized.

Today, school emblems in the world are still essential to school identity and tradition. They often include multiple elements that reflect the school’s history, ethos, and achievements, and they are used on uniforms, stationery, and official documents. Emblems remain an enduring symbol of educational

1) Refer to the web page “On Message: Elements of the Notre Dame Brand Identity” for more details: <https://onmessage.nd.edu/university-branding/logos/university-seal/>

institutions' rich heritage and academic pride.

3. The Cases of Japanese Universities

It is worth reviewing their features to see the transitions and characteristics of Japanese university emblems. Japan sees identifications in emblems in its history and culture, such as in "Monsho" or "Kamon," which is a type of symbol closely tied to the country's traditional heraldry. These things were used on flags, clothing, armor, and various personal belongings as a form of identification. (Sakaguchi, 2020)

Most public and private universities in Japan have adopted the school emblem, which was invented in the 1950s and designed with the letters "大學" (daigakuUniversityty) vertically in old Chinese characters. In the case of Chuo University, the school name is hidden within the upper part of the character "學" of "gaku." Other universities have placed pictures or characters symbolizing themselves under the word "大學." For example, Waseda University has a design of a rice plant, and Kansai University has a reed leaf. Meiji University surrounds itself with the word of its name, Tokai University uses a motif of the ocean, and Senshu University combines a pen and wings. Several women's colleges have feminine symbols, placing the word "university" within a floral design. These examples, viewed side by side, appear to be pictorial puzzles and do not consistently achieve differentiation. They also lack the power to appeal as a university identity or attract modern young people.

4. Transitions to Logos as a Landmark

No one denies that logos of brands are one of the most powerful marketing tools in businesses, reflecting the values and principles they advocate. When it comes to manufacturing and merchandise, people worldwide proudly carry electronic devices with the logo of a piece of fruit and strut around town in sneakers with the symbol called Swish. A logo acts like a signature, used for claiming ownership and protecting against forgeries and imitations. "A logo is a graphic design which companies use to identify themselves and their products," defines Henderson and Cote (1998). There are several studies on the logo creation process, consumer evaluation, and the psychological mechanisms behind their perceptions.

Recognizability of the logos, as well as brand equity and a sense of familiarity, are all involved in persuading people to be obsessed with brands. (Balmer and Gray 2000, Abratt and Kleyn 2012, and Foroudi et al. 2014). Consumption behavior marked by this loyalty is referred to as brand loyalty: an effective logo creates brand loyalty and becomes a status symbol for those who carry it on their T-shirts, bags, caps, and mugs. They are used on various university-related items, including official documents, diplomas, uniforms, banners, and websites. There was a trend to display logos using fancy fonts and three-dimensional images. In the early 1990s, companies increasingly tended to simplify the look of their logos. (Devits, 2016).

More and more universities in Japan are shedding their old emblems and changing their image to a simpler logo. Many of them appear in the design of the first letter of the university's name and the symbolic colors. They can be placed on a patch of an athlete's jersey, appear as a printed mark on a campus T-shirt or cap, and serve more as a cartographic landmark than as an expression of their

university's founding spirit or principles. The simpler, the better: they are visible from a distance and can be used as small icons on digital devices.

5. Fusion with Logos

So far, we have seen that emblems are intricate and traditionally feature a combination of text and imagery within a unified shape, which are usually encased within a badge-like or shield-like frame, and the text is often an integral part of the design. They are commonly associated with heraldic elements, like coats of arms. (Adamson, Riello, & Teasley, 2011) On versatility, emblems are not capable due to their structured design. (Dew, Ansari, & Toubia, 2022) They are often used as stand-alone symbols on official documents, merchandise, and formal applications. However, they might not work well in certain advertising or branding scenarios requiring more flexibility.

Logos, on the other hand, are typically simple, distinct, and flexible. (Wiedemann, 2015) They often consist of a unique graphic or symbol combined with the organization's name in a stylized font. These are called logotypes, in a letterform, using a typography or a customized font with some original designs in a certain language. (Mizukami, 2023) On the other hand, logomark is a logo made to be a symbol that will enhance the company's brand identity.

Logos are designed to be easily recognizable and work effectively across various media and sizes, from digital screens to printed materials. Devits (2016) says, "simplicity within a logo would induce a higher consumption rate in comparison to a complex, difficult-to-process logo" (p. 11). Simple logos are highly versatile and can be used independently without any surrounding elements; for example, they can be placed on different backgrounds and resized without losing clarity or impact. Thus, they are commonly used in advertising, branding, and marketing materials.

The main difference between logos and emblems could be summarized as follows. Emblems are frequently associated with formal and traditional institutions like universities, government organizations, and historical societies. They establish a sense of authority, heritage, or history. On the contrary, logos commonly appear in contemporary branding and marketing strategies. Corporate-style logos are simplified and applied to a wide range of materials, such as websites, social media profiles, product packaging, and business cards. These corporate-style logos are gaining popularity in branding universities. These logos use clean lines, bold fonts, minimal colors, and stylized symbols.

Holloway & Holloway (2005) argue that the relationship between the university and the student and the relationship between the company and the consumer was the same.

They represent the visual identity that the corporate body (university) wishes to use to 'brand' itself and hopefully construct a readily identifiable or memorable association in the consumer's (the student's) mind, leading to some level of consumer commitment to the business (university) and its products/services (university degree)." (p. 36)

The direct concept of a simplified mark brings the two organizations closer together.

University emblems were popular from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century when nobody had an idea to communicate via the Internet or tapping an icon on one's smartphone screen.

Understanding these differences is essential when creating or interpreting visual symbols for different purposes. Of course, some organizations might opt for a logo to project a contemporary and dynamic image, while others might prefer an emblem to convey a sense of authority and tradition.

6. Identity of Universities

“Not only are universities’ logos undergoing a corporate-style transformation, but the form and content of all university imagery are, in general, going through a similar process towards more sophisticated and commercialized texts and practices which emulate the style and form of the corporate environment,” says Gewirtz et al. (1995) Drori et al. (2013) call this shift in university iconography, a movement from an emblem to a logo. They found that university iconography was changing from an “emblem,” or iconographic style representing abstract concepts such as truth, enlightenment, and scholarship, to a “logo,” or branded iconographic style, which was related to recognition, visibility, and the conversion of both into value.

The sense of unity throughout the category of universities has faded, and the design has changed to a simplified version of the alphabet, the initials of their names, and a mark that is extremely dependent on the symbolic colors. These are instantly recognizable, but there is concern that they have lost their academic character.

Is it always a blessing for a university to change to a corporate-like logo? Loughborough University in England, founded in 1909, has used the university’s crest of arms for many years²⁾. This classical emblem was based on a shield. However, in 1995, a simplified logo was proposed that retained the shape of the shield. Then, in 2015, they decided to change to an octagonal logo that did not even leave the form of the shield. According to Dawood (2015), alums objected to this change and collected over 12,000 signatures to stop using the new logo.

The university explained that the new logo was simple, straightforward, and flexible, and they appreciated the ability to customize it. They planned to use the octagonal logo across digital platforms and social media. While they continued to use the traditional emblem for ceremonies, they decided it was unsuitable for digital public relations because of the complexity of the ornamentation.

This example illustrates the strong resistance to change or simplifies the university’s visual identity. The octagonal logo, in particular, has a generic, any-university-can-do-it aspect that is far removed from their previous image. When proposing a new logo, careful preliminary research should be conducted to lay the groundwork for a new logo that is less likely to cause discrepancies.

7. Visual Identity of GLOMAC

The Faculty of Global Management (GLOMAC) is the seventh faculty of Chuo University, which was founded in April 2019. Since its establishment, the color of the faculty has been designated as navy blue (C100%+M80%+Y0%K50% DIC2397)³⁾, and its nickname “GLOMAC” has familiarity among the

2) The emblem and the logos of Loughborough University can be referred in the following URL: <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/27-april-3-may-2015/loughborough-university-halts-new-identity-rollout-following-protests/>

3) This color specification is based on the definition on the official website of Chuo University: https://www.chuo-u.ac.jp/uploads/2022/11/aboutus_communication_brand_mark_21.pdf?1690441254006

students and the faculty members. However, there is still no visual identity to represent branding: the Faculty of Global Informatics was the eighth faculty of Chuo University, established in 2019 at the Ichigaya Campus. It has been designated as “iTL” and has a visual brand logo marked with black, red, and white⁴). Seeing their twin sibling having a logo, quite a few students of GLOMAC have repeatedly suggested that GLOMAC should decide on a logo for its faculty.

After listening to a lecture on “Logo Marketing” on July 7, 2023, the author conducted a survey on manaba to select the three most suitable words for the image of GLOMAC and to choose the best one of six dummy logos that matched the image on the manaba questionnaire section⁵). The participants took part in a survey to select one of six dummy logos that fit the image of GLOMAC. Participation was voluntary, and 239 students responded. 230 of the 239 students (96.2%) were third or fourth-year students GLOMAC. The other students were from the other faculties. The gender ratio and the age groups were not asked.

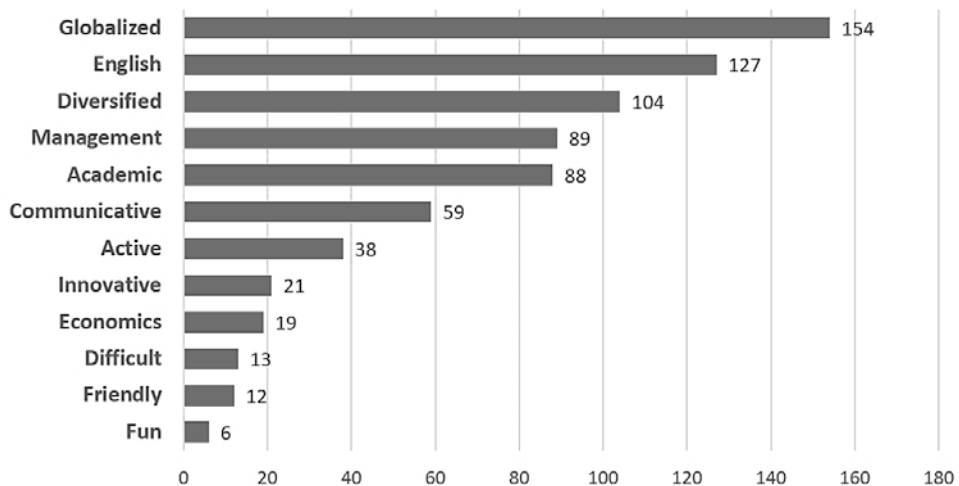


Figure 1: Words matching the image of GLOMAC (three votes each)

The first question asked them to choose three keywords appropriate for GLOMAC from 12 options. Adjectives such as the nouns of the central academic disciplines (business administration and economics), the language used in classes (English), and the characteristics (internationalized, innovative, academic, active, friendly, fun, and diverse) were listed and presented on the questionnaire in alphabetical order. As in Figure 1, the results show that the word “globalized” received the most votes with 154, followed by “English” with 127. It was followed by “diversified” with 104 votes. Then “management” and “academic” followed closely, with 89 and 88 votes, respectively.

It indicates that GLOMAC is characterized by its academic learning policy as well as its educational content and that students are enrolling with an emphasis on globalization and diversity. Although learning in English increases the academic burden and difficulty for students whose native language



4) Faculty of Global Informatics, Chuo University. <https://www.chuo-u.ac.jp/academics/faculties/itl/>

5) “manaba” is a cloud-based educational support service that has been adopted by many educational institutions in Japan. Professors can give quizzes, let students submit their reports, and conduct questionnaires.

is not English, there is a strong perception among students in their third year and above that it is an essential skill to support the “globalized” and “diversified.” Therefore, rather than including a symbol related to management or economics, it is better to design a logo emphasizing incorporating internationalization and a diversified educational environment with some English words or alphabets.

In seeking the most student-endorsed logo design, the author used a free online logo generation platform, BrandCrowd, Canva Free Logo Maker, LOGOMAKER, and Looka, to create a sample⁶⁾. They generated seven types of dummy logos; they were commanded to input the letters GLOMAC, a color specification (if dark blue was unavailable, black was substituted), with or without a picture. The department slogan, “Be Ahead of the World,” the year of foundation, and the name of the university were arranged at random. These were numbered arbitrarily, and the user selected one design a student thought was most appropriate for GLOMAC. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Dummy logo samples and the vote collected in the questionnaire (one vote each)

| | | | |
|------|---|---|---------------------|
| No.1 |  | The logo is square. It has an academic hat and pencil designed in yellow outlines on a navy blue background. Below is the department's name, accompanied by its slogan. | 50 votes (20.9%) |
| No.2 |  | The logo is square. It has an angry brown bear face in the middle, followed by a bold orange typeface of the name of the faculty. It has a navy blue background. The founded year, 2019, is shown below. | 19 votes (7.9%) |
| No.3 |  | This logo is a vertical rectangle. It has a long G letter in purple-pink gradation color to symbolize the faculty's initial letter. The faculty name and the university name are displayed in smaller letters. It has a black background. | 24 votes (10.0%) |
| No.4 |  | The logo is square. It has a G letter in multiple gradation colors. Below is the name of the faculty in white border lettering. ThUniversity's's name is shown below. It has a navy blue-black background. | 35 votes (14.6%) |
| No.5 |  | This logo is a horizontal rectangle. On the left, it has a G letter in a shield shape banner surrounded by golden leaves. On the right, it shows the name of the faculty with bold navy letters sandwiched by its slogan and the year of establishment in gold. | 66 votes (27.6%) |
| No.6 |  | This logo is a horizontal rectangle. Above the navy ribbon banner, it has the name of the faculty. On the ribbon, it shows the slogan of the faculty in white letters. | 40 votes (16.7%) |
| No.7 |  | This logo is based on a black circle. It has an illustration of an imaginary building, the name of the faculty, and the name of thUniversityty below in gold letters and lines. | 7 votes (2.9%) |

6) Free logo generators used for this survey were as follows: BrandCrowd <https://www.brandcrowd.com>, Canva Free Logo Maker <https://www.canva.com/create/logos/>, LOGOMAKER <https://www.logomaker.com/>, and Looka <https://looka.com/logo-maker/>.

The most supported design was No. 4, with 66 votes. This horizontal logo features the letter “G” in the shape of a shield with the word “GLOMAC” on the left, the faculty slogan, and the year of foundation on the side. The base color is navy blue, but the leaves and letters around the shield and the department’s nickname are ochre, reminiscent of gold. In the free text field, students were asked to write their reasons for their choice, if any, for No. 4, commenting that “the shape of the shield makes it look like a Western university, giving it a sense of intelligence” “the letters are easy to see even when reduced in size,” and “only the left side can be used as an icon.

The following logo to receive votes was No. 1, a square shape with a picture of an academic hat and a pencil inside, with the department’s nickname and slogan. The person who chose this logo wrote that it “shows that you have to write your graduation thesis” and “gives the impression that you can be a world leader by studying hard.” Logo No. 5 received 40 votes: some respondents said that the logo was “stable,” “easy to recognize at a glance,” and “would like to print on T-shirts.”

No. 6 is a logo that is conscious of diversity. It has a logo with a colorful “G” symbol in the center, which is designed to symbolize diversity; the author expected it to be the most popular, but it came in fourth place with 35 votes. It was because it does not contain the faculty’s slogan, making it difficult to see when the logo is reduced.

Logos such as No. 3, a vertical design, were not well supported, nor was the round design of No. 7. Noticeable was that No. 2, a logo with an angry bear face, received only 19 votes, but many who did not choose it asked why it was a bear. Including an animal or human face in a logo appeals to people’s awareness and creates a strong impression. However, the data also shows that unless the animal or the character is already familiar, such as a university mascot, the pros and cons of including a creature in the logo of a new department can be divided.

From the results of the GLOMAC survey, we can summarize the following: GLOMAC students and students taking GLOMAC courses have a deep understanding of the characteristics of the department. Furthermore, we believe these characteristics manifest in how they learn and in the academic environment, which precedes the educational content. If we were to select a new logo, we prefer the shape of the shield, which gives it an academic feel like that of a Western university. They want a design that will stand out on the screen and facilitate communication even when scaled down or iconized on a smartphone. We are interested in accompanying it with information that expresses the identity of the faculty (slogan, year of establishment, university name) and expect it to have the emblem aspect favored by Western universities.

8. Discussion

Shall we immediately adopt the popular logo in this survey as the symbol of the faculty? We believe that this is a question that needs to be considered. Visual identities, such as emblems and logos, take a long time to develop. Whether for commercial purposes or not, a corporate logo also takes a long time to be recognized and trusted by consumers. Once a logo for a department has been established, a branding strategy for how it will be utilized must be fully established, or else the department will be unnecessarily proposing a marker that is out of step with the times. A rash decision on a logo can lead to boredom or a lack of congruence with the image, which can reduce the brand’s value. As

Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg (2013) write, “[U]niversity seals are not, by any means, at the heart of the marketization of universities, the commercialization of their knowledge and the redefinition of the boundaries of the academic community.” (p. 148)

After more than five years since its opening, GLOMAC needs to carefully discuss whether we should decide on a logo for the faculty at this time. For example, if there is a move to adopt a logo for every faculty on campus at once, it would be a good idea to refine the design contemplated at that time. To cite one example, the Nihon University College of Law (NUCL) has established a logo different from their university. It utilizes it on its web page and social media. Nihon University’s School of Dentistry at Matsudo also has its logo, which has been commercialized in mugs and other products in some cases⁷⁾. While it may be significant for a large faculty to have an independent logo, it is questionable whether it would be in high demand for a faculty like GLOMAC, which has about 300 students per academic year. It would be a good idea to have a process whereby the identity of the faculty is questioned once again by soliciting applications from students at celebratory events such as the 10th anniversary of the founding of GLOMAC.

9. Conclusion

This paper reviewed the history of university emblems, seals, and logos. Once complex and informative, university emblems have moved toward simplification, and today, they serve the same function as corporate logos. While there are many opinions on the commercialization of university academics, simple corporate logotype markers are necessary to communicate with young people, especially in flaunting brand identity on the Internet and social media. In this paper, we surveyed 239 GLOMAC students. We found specific trends in terms of critical terms, color and typology, and elements expressing intelligence that are consistent with the identity of the faculty. For groups with relatively small market sizes, such as small or newly established faculties, the necessity of a logo is not so high. It should not be established in the short term but should be part of a branding strategy in the extended period.

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7) The Law Faculty, Nihon University has an admission capacity of 1,733 students per academic year. <https://nulaw.jp/number/>

School of Dentistry at Matsudo, Nihon University has an admission capacity of 780 students, relatively small as a department. <https://www.masc.nihon-u.ac.jp/data/uploads/education/11/104/pdf1.pdf>

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