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**From Chaos, Community: The Crisis Leadership of
Virginia Tech President Charles W. Steger**

"I am really at a loss for words to explain or to understand the carnage that has visited our campus."¹ Charles Steger, [Virginia Tech President](#)

For many, including myself, these words uttered so shortly after the heinous murders still hold their strength today.² Just how does one explain or understand what occurred? The impact on Virginia Tech and the [surrounding communities](#) is beyond words. Even [picture](#) and [video](#) memorials fail to convey the scope of the emotion and hurt suffered after the vicious slayings. Fortunately, my task is neither to convey this sense of emotion or to understand the events of

4/16/2007, but rather to look closely at how one person explained the events of that day: Virginia Tech President Charles Steger. Even so, questions of how to proceed remain. How does one look at what President Steger said about the murders? Commentators have said much, yet so many say so little. Just what can a communication perspective offer? It seems to me that there are some common and inter-animated elements with which to work: first, a crisis; second, a President; and third, a special issue about narratives in times of crises. I keep this in mind as I look at President Steger's public statements about the murders.³

Presidential Crisis Rhetoric

I grant you that being President of a University and being President of the United States are two very different enterprises. Yet there are insights to be had if one reflects upon President Steger's responses with an understanding of presidential crisis rhetoric. As the leader of the [Hokie Nation](#), Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff, [alumni](#), and associates worldwide looked to President Steger for leadership following the rampage. His was a difficult role to fill, given that the nature of the crisis was different for the many different groups associated with Virginia Tech.

Before I move to how President Steger responded to the crisis, it makes sense to spend some time discussing what [communication scholars](#) know about presidential crisis communication.⁴ One item seems certain, that crises involve the perception of "immediacy and urgency," as well as the public expectation of "strong leadership qualities."⁵ Traditional conceptions of crisis rhetoric view crises largely or even completely as rhetorical creations, that a president announces a crisis as a crisis and that the situation demands that he "act decisively."⁶ With this act of announcement, the president asks for his decision to be supported, not for debate upon what should be done. So long as the crisis is not one of a military attack upon the United States, the reasoning goes, it is to be considered a "political event rhetorically created by the

President.”⁷ The president is not, however, free to do as he pleases when discursively responding to a crisis; his rhetorical options are limited by “precedent, tradition, and expediency.”⁸

I know, the shootings were not a political event; they were pre-meditated and carefully performed executions. So, President Steger was responding to an event, but he was still in a position to characterize that event in a certain way. How he did this helped to shape the perception of Virginia Tech and additional tens-of-millions of Americans. In a sense, President Steger found himself responding to a complex and large rhetorical situation. Rhetorical situations—a combination of exigency, audience, and constraints—act to suggest a variable range of responses from a speaker, in this case, the president announcing a crisis situation.⁹ One could, then, understand crises as situationally bound; moreover, they are delimited by context (both discursive and material surroundings) acting upon text, and by text acting upon context, within a limited period of time.¹⁰ This is to say, an inter-animation of text and context occurs; text and context are naturally interacting and evolving elements within any rhetorical situation. Crisis situations often involve a rather violent mix of text/context interaction, often with a demand for quick interpretation from the public. This view supports a reading of crises that views an exigency as highly unstable and mutable. Put another way, the slayings had created a crisis; all interested parties wanted a context through which to understand what happened; President Steger acted to provide this context. What he had to say not only served to explain the situation, but also acted to create a stable context through which to understand the situation.¹¹

The invention of a stable context may take some period of time, yet it is the most important criterion for a fitting response to a crisis situation. Viewed traditionally, presidential speeches announcing a crisis “begin with an assertion of the President’s control of the facts of

the situation and an acknowledgement that the New Facts which occasion the speech constitute a New Situation—a crisis for the United States.”¹² First utterances are first characterizations; they set the tone. Steger’s initial tone was one of gravity, objectivity, and patience responding to questions about the situation.

First Utterances

Here, in its entirety, is the first mass public statement made by President Steger—an email to all Virginia Tech .edu addresses:

Date: Mon, 16 Apr 2007 12:41:44 -0400
From: Unirel@vt.edu
Subject: Statement by President Charles W. Steger
To: Multiple recipients <LISTSERV@LISTSERV.VT.EDU>

Shooting at Virginia Tech / Statement by President Charles W. Steger

The university was struck today with a tragedy of monumental proportions. There were two shootings on campus. In each case, there were fatalities. The university is shocked and horrified that this would befall our campus. I want to extend my deepest, sincerest and most profound sympathies to the families of these victims which include students. There are 22 confirmed deaths.

We currently are in the process of notifying families of victims. The Virginia Tech Police are being assisted by numerous other jurisdictions. Crime scenes are being investigated by the FBI, University Police, and State Police. We continue to work to identify the victims impacted by this tragedy. I cannot begin to convey my own personal sense of loss over this senselessness of such an incomprehensible and heinous act. The university will immediately set up counseling centers. So far centers have been identified in Ambler Johnson and the Cook Counseling Center to work with our campus community and families.

Here are some of the facts we know:

At about 7:15 a.m. this morning a 911 call came to the University Police Department concerning an event in West Amber Johnston Hall. There were multiple shooting victims. While in the process of investigating, about two hours later the university received reports of a shooting in Norris Hall. The police immediately responded. Victims have been transported to various hospitals in the immediate area in the region to receive emergency treatment.

We will proceed to contact the families of victims as identities are available.

All classes are cancelled and the university is closed for the remainder for the today. The university will open tomorrow at 8 a.m. but classes will be cancelled on Tuesday. The police are currently staging the release of people from campus buildings.

Families wishing to reunite with the students are suggested to meet at the Inn at Virginia Tech. We are making plans for a convocation tomorrow (Tuesday) at noon at Cassell Coliseum for the university community to come together to begin to deal with the tragedy.

The initial discourse is primarily factual. This is certainly in keeping with immediate needs of listeners: What happened? As mentioned earlier, crises are generally viewed as constructed by presidents, either downplaying significance of events or highlighting them, bringing a crisis into being to justify policy decisions. These murders happened *to* Virginia Tech, however; President Steger was responding, trying to characterize what occurred. Since the general consensus was that a crisis existed, President Steger's response to the crisis is, by definition, crisis rhetoric.

What he could say is both constrained by and contextualizes the public response to the situation.

Epidictic Elements

When responding to a perception of crisis already in place, we move into the realm of epideictic rhetoric. In short, presidents responding to the perception of crises are expected to provide communal understanding. I believe that an epideictic response functions to prevent disparate interpretations of the situation and to "promote continuity, restore communal feeling, and . . . reconcile the audience to a new situation."¹³ Be that as it may, responses to crises can also have a deliberative edge. This is to say, portions of the response are used to demonstrate that the policy being enacted in response to a crisis is "expedient, reasoned and prudent."¹⁴

As we'll see in a moment, President Steger does both. He provides statement of facts, tells what is being done, but also speaks to the shared nature of the tragedy.

Looking for the Narrative

There are two broad concerns that exist as fragments of discourse embedded throughout the entirety of President Steger's response to the murders. For our purposes—finding out the overall public message President Steger presented, these fragments may be combined and read as a composite narrative. This composite narrative is simply the aggregate combination of smaller narratives and the thematic fragments found throughout President Steger's responses to the murders.¹⁵ President Steger was remarkably consistent with what he [said](#) in the 24-hour period following the slayings. His utterances fall into two broad categories: description of events and epideictic concerns.

I read president Steger's comments chronologically, but also with an eye for their basic structure. In one sense, as I read I conflated his comments into their basic structure, into one narrative reply to the incident. Thus my reading is of the archetypal Steger narrative, a composite narrative. My idea is to understand how president Steger's voice functioned in setting the tone of interaction following 4/16.

The 16 April 2007, 4:00 p.m. Press Conference

“Can you say why the students weren't notified for two hours
that there had been a shooting on campus?”¹⁶

This question was a consistent presence in President Steger's life following the shootings, and he often repeated his initial reply: “They were notified that there was a shooting. You have to remember that, of the about 26,000 students that we have here, only 9,000 are on campus. [W]hen classes start at 8:00 [a.m.], thousands of people are already in transit. So, the question is, where do you keep them where it is most safe? [W]e concluded first that the incident in the

Ambler Johnston was domestic in nature. In fact, we had some reason to think the shooter had left the campus . . . may have been leaving the state. And this other event occurred two hours later.”¹⁷

This was followed by another oft-repeated question: “Well, the first blast e-mail didn’t arrive to the students until 9:26.”¹⁸ To this President Steger replied: “Well, that’s when we were able to confirm the call came in to the 911 center at 7:15. I don’t know when the police got there. It was five or 10 minutes later. Then we interviewed witnesses to try to find out what was going on, and then decide what the best course of action was to do.”¹⁹

The media wanted to know why the campus was not closed. President Steger replied: “Well, it’s very difficult, because we are an open society and an open campus. And we have over 26,000 people here in hundreds of buildings.” Differentiating between campus and buildings on campus, he later added, “Let me get back to your question about closing the campus. When the shooting occurred at Ambler Johnston, that’s building was closed immediately.”²⁰

When again asked about the lockdown policy, President Steger replied: “[O]bviously every situation you face is—is different. [W]e . . . have 9,000 students on campus and about 14,000 student off campus coming in. [W]hat we try to determine is, are they most kept out of harm’s way by staying in the dorms or staying in the academic buildings. And the latter was the decision this morning. But with 11,000 people driving into campus, it’s extremely difficult, if not almost impossible, to get the word out instantaneously.”²¹

And again, later in the same press conference, another question and reply about the lockdown and communication with students: “But you had to remember,” said President Steger, “that classes start at 8:00. The call came into the 911 center at about 7:15. We’ve got 14,000

people en route. So the question is where do you lock them down? The students are already—it takes 20 minutes to walk from some parts of campus to the classrooms. So people are already in transit. So the decision was. . . .”²²

At which point he was interrupted, “(UNINTELLIGIBLE) over the radio telling people not to come to class? STEGER: Well, they’re not listening to radios as they’re walking across campus. But. . . .”²³

Again, an interruption, “QUESTION: . . . some kind of communication? STEGER: Well, we did. We had the sirens going off. We sent out I-messages. We sent out emails and we utilized a telephone tree.”²⁴

This exchange was followed by yet another question about the time period between the first shooting and student notification: “Why did it take so long, then [to send the first email to all students]?”²⁵ Steger: “Well, the—one, again, the call came into 911 at 7:15. You’ve got to have time for the police to get there. Then you’ve got to—they were interviewing witnesses. We were talking to figure out what we knew about what happened. And then you have to make the decision about canceling classes and all of that. So by the time you go through all of that, it takes a little time.”²⁶

Repeating Stories

Even during the first press conference there were numerous instances of similar questions being asked, of requests for the same information; it was as if the press were willing Steger to offer a different explanation. This is not unusual at press conferences, as questioners try to squeeze out every ounce of information they can from a speaker. Such questioning can, however, present an opportunity for an accomplished speaker; they allow for the consistent repetition of information, thus the opportunity to establish a storyline of sorts.

Additional press contacts on the 16th and 17th offered this same opportunity for President Steger to reiterate Tech's version of events. For example, during a brief interview with Katie Couric, President Steger had the opportunity to again revisit previous topics. Notice the tighter nature of his story:

Well, as you know, there were two shooting events. And the first one we got the 911 call about 7:15, and our security people thought it was confined to that particular incident.

Two young people in a dorm room. We immediately locked down. . .

COURIC: That was when a gunman came to a freshman dorm. . .

STEGER: Right. Well, we didn't know at the time. It could have been a murder/suicide, for example. We just didn't know. So we quickly closed the dormitory and began interviewing witnesses to determine what we could. We were also looking for a murder weapon at the time. But nevertheless, it's exceedingly troubling. And then what subsequently followed is difficult to comprehend, the tragedy that has occurred today.²⁷

As do others, Couric asked, "why was there not a lockdown on campus when there was a suspect at large, even though the authorities thought he had left the campus. . . ."²⁸ To which Steger crisply replied, "One, you have to appreciate the campus is like a city. We have 26,000 students, 10,000 employees, hundreds of buildings. And we also have 9,000 students who live here, but another 14,000 in transit coming into their first classes. So we were acting based on the advice of our security people at the time where they thought this incident had occurred. We weren't even sure there was another suspect at that point in time."²⁹

At the next press conference, President Steger offered a statement. His relaying of facts was even smoother, more tightly focused; in one sense, pre-empting press questions.

At 7:15 AM, Virginia Tech Police received a 911 call to respond to a dormitory room. . . . Within minutes . . . two gunshot victims [were found]. The residence hall was immediately secured . . . and students within the Hall were notified and asked to remain in their rooms for their safety. Virginia Tech police . . . began questioning dorm residents. . . . [It] was believed the deaths were an isolated incident, domestic in nature. [A] safety perimeter [was established] around the residence hall. . . . At 7:30 AM, investigators were following up on leads concerning the person of interest. . . . Investigators from the Virginia Tech police and Blacksburg police were actively following up on various levels. At 8:25, the . . . leadership team assembles . . . and began assessing the developing situation . . . and determining a means of notifying students of the homicide. At 9:00 AM, a team was briefed. At 9:26, the Virginia Tech community . . . that's about 36,000 e-mails, were notified of a homicide investigation. . . . The Virginia Tech emergency red alarm recording were also transmitted, and a broadcast telephone message was made to campus phones. A press release was . . . posted on the Virginia Tech website. At 9:45, the Virginia Tech police received a 911 call of a shooting at Norris Hall. [They] immediately responded. [We] were actually having a meeting about the earlier shooting when we got word on the radio that another shooting was underway. Upon arrival to Norris, the officers found the front doors barricaded. Within a minute, the officers breached the doors. . . . The officers discovered the gunman, who had taken his own life. And at 9:55, by the same means as prior notice, Virginia Tech notified campus community of the second murder scene.³⁰

Still, the question of timing lingered: “Are you satisfied with the decision made that your leadership being. . . STEGER: I went to the timeline. And I think it’s very important that before you take these actions, you know what the facts are. And it takes some time to do that. Based on that, I think we did everything we could, based on what we knew at that time.”³¹ One reporter raised the issue of closing campus: “REPORTER: The chief [Wendell Flinchum] considered . . . blocking off the roads into campus. Did you consider telling everybody to just go and go quickly? You waited a long time. STEGER: [L]eaving campus is a significant event. If you know that we have 9,000 on campus, but we have 26,000 all together. If you add together our part-time and full-time employees, we have 10,000 employees. [W]e also have, on any given day, literally several thousands of visitors. So we did block off Washington Street immediately . . . and then subsequently . . . we shut down the entire campus with barricades . . . But it’s not something that can happen instantaneously. . . .”³²

Even after this, calls for explanation remained: In “an earlier press conference, you guys mentioned that, you guys knew about this, about—8:25 is the timeline. . . . Why did it take a whole hour from 8:25 to 9:26. . . . Why [wasn’t] an e-mail was sent as soon as you’ve heard. . . STEGER: Well, we were trying to determine what had happened, and in interviewing witnesses and things of this sort. And until you know what the facts are, it’s difficult to craft what the appropriate response is.”³³

Power of Repetition

These “repetitive presentations,” according to Michael Osborn, “show us what we already know and accept, but in a manner that attempts to reinforce our acceptance.”³⁴ Whether or not the repetition comes from press prompting or from a president reiterating, the “cumulative effect of repetitive presentation is to imprint certain symbolic configurations upon our minds. . .

.”³⁵ President Steger repeated numerous times the same information, eventually forming Tech’s official narrative account about the timeline of that day. Michael Calvin McGee has advanced an instructive notion of narrative that provides insight into the practical nature of such a narrative. McGee wrote: Narration “was the second division of an oration meant to influence interpreters (judges in courts of law) to ratify a particular reading of a collection of facts and act with the privileged reading as a behavioral directive. Stories, in other words, ‘contextualized’ the need to make decisions in a court of law, not as a determinant, but as a frame.”³⁶ Although President Steger was not in a court of law, he was in the court of Hokie opinion (some would say national opinion) and was attempting to build the context through which both the murders and the recovery could be viewed.

Facts and Movement Toward Epideictic

Even during the earliest moments of speaking out, President Steger offered more than just the facts, just the bare chronology of events during these press conferences and interviews. He also offered personal interpretation, and words designed to move beyond facts. Although at this time subordinate to factual material, he did speak to the spirit and to the collective involvement of Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff, and alumni:

I want to repeat my horror and disbelief and profound sorrow at the events of today.

People from around the world have experienced their shock and their sorrow and endless sadness that has transpired. I am really at a loss for words to explain or to understand the carnage that has visited our campus. I know no other way to speak about this, than to tell you what we know. It is now confirmed that we have 31 deaths from the Norris Hall, including the gunman. Fifteen other victims are being treated at local hospitals. . . .

There are two confirmed deaths from the shooting in Ambler Johnston dormitory. . . .

We have not confirmed the identity of the gunman, because he carried no identification. . . . And we are in the process of attempting identification. Norris Hall is a tragic and a sorrowful crime scene. And we are in the process of identifying victims and in the process of notifying next of kin. This may take some time. We will not release any names until we are positive of this notification. We anticipate being able to release a list some time tomorrow. Our investigation continues into whether there is a connection between the first and second incident. We know that parents will want to embrace their children.”³⁷

Asked about how Virginia Tech would move forward, Steger replied: “Well, I think we have to think very carefully about the process of healing and bringing this community back together. We’re going to be—we have dozens of meetings with students. We have a convocation tomorrow. And it’s going to be a long, difficult road for people to feel the same way about going in, particularly in the buildings where the shootings occurred where they’ve been in the past.”³⁸

He was asked later a question along similar lines: What “steps is Virginia Tech taking to deal with the psychological impact on Virginia Tech community and, you know, you guys, the regions all across the nation with the football and everything like that?”³⁹ President Steger: “We have set two counseling centers up. . . . I understand there’s a candlelight vigil being conducted later this evening. We have a convocation tomorrow. . . . We have our counseling center staff available and we’ll be holding other sessions. We’re trying to get an assessment of the number of people impacted. . . . It’s a very serious problem. At this point in time, we’re focusing our energies on the families—some of them are here right now—notifying them and working with them and helping the university community to heal itself.”⁴⁰

The Morning of the 17th

By the next morning, President Steger's narrative account had tightened considerably. During a 6:00 a.m. interview with John Roberts, President Steger again was asked, "One of the big points of controversy here, and this comes from every student at Virginia Tech that I have talked to is, why was there a two hour and 10 minute lag between the time that there was the shooting at West AJ at 7:15 and the time that the e-mail went out at 9:26 notifying students that something had happened?"⁴¹ This afforded President Steger yet another opportunity of repetition:

[W]hen the event happened at AJ, the dormitory was immediately closed down. It was surrounded by security guards. The streets were cordoned off and the students in the building were notified of what was going on. We also had to find witnesses because we didn't know what had happened. The individuals who were [shot] were sent to the hospital and it was based on the interrogation of the witnesses that we think there was another person involved. And so we wanted to be sure we could gather as much accurate information before taking steps. But, it was—the situation was characterized as being confined to that dormitory room. We thought we had it under control. And I don't think anyone could have predicted that another event was going to take place two hours later.⁴²

At 7:00a.m. President Steger was interviewed by NBC's Matt Lauer, who essentially asked the same question: You are still "facing some very difficult questions from . . . students and from parents and from law enforcement people . . . who are saying, 'We had a shooting at 7:15 . . . and yet an e-mail didn't go out warning student to be even cautious until two hours later.'"⁴³ Steger replied in now characteristic fashion: "Well, the incident, as it was reported by our security people, was believed to be confined to that one room, an incident between two

individuals. When that happened, we immediately closed down that dormitory, surrounded it with security.”⁴⁴ The remainder of this brief interview forces this issue:

LAUER: But you didn’t find a shooter at that time. . . . And so you had to assume that he was at large. . . .

MR. STEGER: Well, we had to first see whether or not there was a murder weapon, and whether or not it was a murder/suicide. And then we had to track down witnesses to see if anybody saw anything else, and that’s what took some time.

LAUER: I think what I’ve been hearing, talking to students . . . and people over the last 20 hours of so . . . is why not assume the worst case scenario? Why not err on the side of caution and say that “We’ve got someone who’s taken either one or two’—if it’s murder/suicide, end of story . . . but if it’s someone who’s taken two lives . . . the game has changed, and that person now has nothing to lose.

MR. STEGER: Well, you have to appreciate that, of our 26,000 students, only 9,000 live on campus. So at that time of the morning, we’ve got about 15—16,000 people in transit, you got another 7,000 employees and two or 3,000 visitors on the campus. And so these people are going to be all over campus. So we felt . . . letting them get into the classroom and then closing down the classrooms, which is what we did, was the best way. . . .⁴⁵

However, there was an epideictic moment to the interview, when President Steger said: “[W]e love our students, and we think the community that we built here is a very rich one that is very caring and we’re interdependent and we’re going to do everything we can to help our students make their way through this very difficult process. Lauer: And to their parents. . . . MR.

STEGER: We cannot describe . . . the sorrow they must feel. It is—words is—simply can’t capture it.”⁴⁶

[What follows is an additional example of an epideictic moment included in the original html document]

At the 7:00a.m. press conference following the Lauer Interview, President Steger made this announcement: “Thank you. Well, as you know, we are continuing to work to try to comprehend and understand the terrible tragedy that occurred on the campus yesterday. We send out thoughts and prayers to the families and friends of our students, and we must begin to work through the process of providing assistance to them. It is very difficult for me to express how we feel about what has occurred on campus, but I want to assure you that we’re doing everything possible to move forward. We’re here this morning to provide you with the latest information involving the tragedy. . . . [As] many of you . . . approach some of these families, please keep in mind the terrible tragedy that they’re experiencing.”⁴⁷

Another Repetition

Following the press conference, Diane Sawyer, who immediately turned to the issue of notification, again raising the familiar refrain of the 2-hour campus-wide notification window, interviewed President Steger. Sawyer suggested anonymous parents have just called for Steger to step down because “it is so clear in this window in which notification did not take place, lives could have been saved.”⁴⁸ Steger replied, “I don’t think you can come to that conclusion at all. Let me just give you a little bit of background. As I mentioned, when the first shooting was reported, the police responded within a few minutes. They closed the dormitory, surrounded it with security forces, cordoned off the road, and notified the students in the building. All of our information indicated that it was an incident confined to that building. The second shooting, no one could predict that that was also going to happen that morning. So, if you talk about locking

it down, what is it that you're going to lock down? I mean . . . it's like closing a city. And it doesn't happen instantaneously. So as soon as we had accurate information, we took steps to deal with it.

MS. SAWYER: So you're saying you would do it the same way again of that first shooting, without notification?

MR. STEGER: Based on what—well, we notified all the people we thought impacted by that's. And it looked like—

MS. SAWYER: But not an email to the whole campus.

MR. STEGER: Not at the—it took us about, actually 30 minutes or so to find one of the witnesses even, to try to figure out what was going on. At first we thought it was probably a murder-suicide only involving those people.”⁴⁹

Sawyer pressed the issue of notification, “but, in the uncertainty, should you have acted to send out as much notification as possible?”⁵⁰ Steger offered a familiar narrative of events here: “Well, the question is, you have all these thousands of people en route. Now, what are they supposed to do? You can't just cordon off the campus, because if you lock up 9,000 in the dorms, they have to be fed, we have to have health services, we have to have security people, all those barricades now [that have to be put out] by the buildings and grounds people. So it's not so simple, is my point.”⁵¹

Pressing still, Sawyer said, “But safety is paramount.” His reply, “safety is paramount. And we acted in a way we felt looked after the safety of our students,” led Sawyer to ask, “And their call that you step down, you want to say that. . . .” The reply was curt—“I have no intention of stepping down”—after which the interview abruptly ended: “MS. SAWYER: Well, I know there is grief all around this morning. MR. STEGER: There certainly is.”⁵²

Convocation Remarks

Narratives are founded upon something pre-given and pre-known. Yet in responding to a crisis, Presidents are in the business of providing the basic information necessary to understand the crisis. At some point, however, a shift in focus to the epideictic side of crisis response sees the pre-given and pre-known aspects come to the fore.

President Steger was one of several important speakers at the 2:00 p.m., 17 April [Convocation](#). I feel, though, that his role as President of Virginia Tech lifted the importance of his words above those of [President Bush](#) and Virginia [Governor Kaine](#). The slayings were of Virginia Tech students and faculty. Although having the support of President Bush and Governor Kaine was exceptional, those present looked for words from their leader, their school president. In his short speech, President Steger spoke to Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff, and alumni, giving information, but shifting into an epideictic mode, thus moving to address the growing need for healing over timeline information. His speech is brief, but hit numerous important benchmarks for a successful epideictic speech. His appearance behind the podium was met with a standing ovation:

[HTML version contains video of speech here]

Certainly President Steger acknowledges his own emotions and of the emotions of those to whom he is speaking; he acknowledged the shared experience, the attack on the common community, and the importance of moving on: “In the last day I’ve expressed my horror and shock, but there really are no words that truly express the depth of sadness that we feel. It’s overwhelming, almost paralyzing, yet our hearts and our minds call to us to come together to share our individual attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible, to make sense of the

senseless, and to find ways for our community to heal, and to slowly and painfully but inevitably to begin to heal and to again move forward.”⁵³

Enjoining community, he stressed, “We are very grateful that we do not have to travel this path alone. . . . The expressions of sympathy and support that have poured in from all corners of our nation and from around the world . . . have touched us. They help us cope with the incredible tragedy and have reaffirmed our basic belief in the goodness of people.”⁵⁴ The first part of the speech is epideictic, whereas the second half of the speech provides necessary information for Virginia Tech. With this speech, Steger’s role as information provider and defender of the timeline wanes, his epideictic role waxes.

Thoughts on Epideictic Rhetoric

Certainly the Convocation address uses both an epideictic approach and an informative one. However, this speech presages a shift to an epideictic role. As mentioned earlier, there is an epideictic nature to presidential crisis rhetoric. Yes, this seems obvious when considering the ceremonial nature of some responses to crisis situations. However, as seen, it also comes into play during news conferences and interviews. When looking at President Steger’s responses to 4/16, one finds scattered epideictic moments throughout his utterances. When considering the epideictic dimension of his responses, one must keep in mind the community building nature of epideictic rhetoric.

Discussions concerning the nature of epideictic rhetoric go back thousands of years. For instance, it was Aristotle who said epideictic speeches invite audiences to participate in a ritual celebration. More recently, Richard Chase opined that “praise and blame,” not delivery, is what distinguishes epideictic discourse from other types.⁵⁵ However, it is also considerably more than praise or blame, celebration or lament. Lawrence Rosenfield, for instance, argued that epideictic

encompasses both the speech and the object of the speech, what he called “the luminosity of noble acts and thoughts.”⁵⁶ I like this last characterization. The epideictic speech acts to both embody and highlight “virtue, goodness, the quality inherent in object or deed”; in other words, a person, item, or event’s inherent goodness compels the speaker to acknowledge it.⁵⁷ We will see hints of this when President Steger characterizes the Hokie Spirit in later speaking opportunities.

In contrast to Rosenfield, some believe that epideictic rhetoric is effective only when it successfully functions as a ritual.⁵⁸ Such is the case, they argue, since “ritual achieves meaning and function that is beyond the potential or ordinary, pragmatic behavior and language.”⁵⁹ Taking into account the ritual dimension of epideictic, researchers following this line of reasoning argue that epideictic rhetoric reinforces a society’s communal values.⁶⁰ In a sense, epideictic works to provide both order and a sense of communal identity.

I am inclined to believe, though, that this function of epideictic does not necessarily draw its strength from the ritualized setting in which it occurs, but rather from the overall situation to which it responds and how the speaker’s response fits in with the needs of a particular audience. Much of what President Steger said in the epideictic vein was about Virginia Tech identity, or the community that is Virginia Tech. Celeste Condit assigned epideictic a “communal definition,”⁶¹ and emphasized that through epideictic discourse, “the community renews its conception of itself and of what is good by explaining what it has previously held to be good.”⁶² It is a way of “rekindling settled values through a process of steady inculcation.”⁶³ Or, put another way, a connecting of “people to a greater consciousness” and the creation “in the members of the audience a recognition of their oneness, a sense of communality.”⁶⁴

In a most basic sense, then, epideictic is a type of community building discourse. As Cynthia Sheard wrote, epideictic “strengthens social or institutional cohesion by generating a kind of communal knowledge, a set of palatable cultural truths.”⁶⁵ For a University community, this level of epideictic understanding would mean that we look at how the community talked to itself as a community; we look at how it defines itself, and how that vision is carried forward into the future.

Here we see another parallel between the rhetoric of United States Presidents and President Steger. Mary Stuckey, writing of presidential speaking, stated that, “more than any other participant in the national conversation, the task of articulating the collective culture . . . belongs to the president.”⁶⁶ His “ability to articulate a specific vision of national identity is greatest on ceremonial occasions, when the speech act itself centers on national values.”⁶⁷ Using these national values, the president will instill the nation’s loss with meaning. Thus, “the troubling event will be made less confusing and threatening, providing a sense of comfort for the audience.”⁶⁸ No less so were Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff, and alumni looking to President Steger to help define the terrible loss for them.

President Steger did not give a public eulogy for the victims, but he did speak of them in ways that made all Hokies part of the event. Anyone of us—students, faculty, or staff—could have been in those rooms. Keeping this in mind, one way in which epideictic seeks to reunite a ruptured community is through an “appeal to the audience to carry on the works, to embody the virtues or to live as the deceased would have wished.”⁶⁹

President Steger's Shift to Epideictic

Following this convocation, president Steger's public discourse took on an epideictic edge, but continued providing information. His 20 April 2007 email to members of the Virginia Tech Community [[pop-up window link in HTML version](#)]

From: president-resc@exchange.vt.edu
[mailto:president-resc@exchange.vt.edu]
Sent: Friday, April 20, 2007 7:12 AM
To: Multiple recipients
Subject: We Will Prevail

Dear Fellow Members of the Virginia Tech Community:

First, I wish I could speak to each of you individually to thank you for your courage and dedication and to tell you how much your support has meant to our students, to their families, to the members of our extended community, and to me personally.

During the horror of the last few days, the one bright light in the darkness has been the strength and spirit so prevalent across campus. As both President Bush and Governor Kaine noted, and as the world has seen, Virginia Tech is a community in the truest sense of the word. I know I speak for many others when I tell you how proud I am of you, and from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

After this traumatic experience, it will be difficult to resume our lives and duties. But start again, we must. By working together with the spirit and bond strengthened by this tragedy, we will move forward in a way that will honor the memory of those we have lost.

In that vein, we believe it best to resume classes on Monday, April 23. Commencement will proceed as scheduled on May 11. Our graduating seniors and their families need and deserve this time to mark their accomplishments and to start the next phase of their lives. All of the deceased student victims will be honored with posthumous degrees.

For our students, information about course work has been posted on the Virginia Tech home page. There will be a great deal of flexibility in providing options for completing the semester.

In closing, I can only echo a few of the stirring words of Nikki Giovanni: "Through all our sadness . . . we will prevail."

I thank you, and again ask that you take care of yourselves, your families, and each other.

Most sincerely,

Charles W. Steger
President

spoke of the “courage and dedication” of community members. He thanked members for their support of each other and to him, personally. Additionally, “During the horror of the last few days, the one bright light in the darkness has been the strength and spirit so prevalent across campus. . . . Virginia Tech is a community in the truest sense of the word.”⁷⁰ Speaking to the future, “After this traumatic experience, it will be difficult to resume our lives and duties. But start again, we must.”⁷¹ He enjoined community members to work “together with the spirit and bond strengthened by this tragedy . . . [and to] move forward in a way that will honor the memory of those we have lost.”⁷² The email concluded with information about the resumption of classes.

In a message posted on the Virginia Tech website the following day, President Steger wrote: “I am very proud of the manner in which our faculty, staff, and students have united this week as a family. We have demonstrated that we are not going to allow the tragic events of this last week to divide or define us.”⁷³ This time was instead to be one of “healing” and taking “care of one another” and of moving “forward to ‘Invent the Future.’”⁷⁴

Ten days after the slayings, President Steger was featured in an interview with the [*Chronicle of Higher Education*](#). He was presented with rather open-ended questions, which allowed him to direct the flow of conversation toward epideictic concerns. For example, he was asked what it was like to be president over the past nine days. Steger replied that he was “overwhelmed by the expressions of support . . . as well as the resilience and strength of this

community. . . . [W]e've drawn a great deal of strength from [this]."⁷⁵ Did he have any advice for others? "[W]e'll continue to . . . keep nurturing and building that sense of community and shared purpose. . . ."⁷⁶ What did he see as the president's role? "Well, my role really did not change . . . the intensity of the activity did. [I must continue] to articulate the priorities of the institution. How do we . . . help these families? How do we work with our student body and take them, as well as our broader community, through a process of grieving? How do we get the campus back to normal?"⁷⁷ Asked about the personal emotional toll, Steger confessed: "I must confess that the amount of sleep that I've been getting is not [what it should be.] And so I think we're all very focused on moving the institution forward, very focused on offering support for the families and the students, and we're all very tired."⁷⁸ And a final question, asking him to mention anything he'd like: "we're going to be spending a lot of time planning and being sure that when the student come back [in the fall], we really get off to a great start. I want to be sure that when the kids come back that we provide all the support and comfort and excitement and fun. . . . We are going to certainly recognize the individuals [who were murdered]. We want to do it in a way, though, that reflects on the future."⁷⁹

In a 7 May 2007 letter to the Families of Virginia Tech Students, we see President Steger once again blending the information sharing functions and the epideictic functions of presidential crisis rhetoric, although focusing on epideictic functions. He acknowledges the mind numbing, incomprehensible nature of the violence that visited the campus on 4/16. He focuses again on the families who lost loved ones, on the injured, and on the "needs of our greater university community."⁸⁰ He continues, stating that he is "buoyed by the spirit and resilience of our students, faculty, and staff. The world has now seen a phenomenon that has surprised even those of us who live and experience it—the Hokie Spirit."⁸¹

From this point his letter moves into information mode, speaking to points of campus security, and to upcoming changes.

The final third asks, “And how will we move ahead?” By relying on the Hokie Spirit: “We will move ahead by relying on the spirit that the world has seen both so clearly needed and so clearly evident in these past few weeks, a spirit that creates a sense of family and togetherness here that is virtually unheard of on other large campuses, a spirit that brought together Hokies past, present, and future here in Blacksburg and around the globe to mobilize in ways that were, and still are, remarkable. It is this Hokie Spirit and it binds us together.”⁸²

This spirit pervades the Hokie family, of which President Steger is a part; leader, yes, but not all-powerful father, not perfect, rather avuncular. The families of students, as well as the students, “are our partners in moving forward in remembering and reconciling our losses and inventing our future. We will need a collective will to prevail, to rise above this tragedy, to help every member of the Virginia Tech family. . . .”⁸³ This notion of family surfaces again later.

Commencement Address

By the time of [Commencement](#), the epideictic nature of the context was firmly established. President Steger’s address, which you may read [here](#) or listen to [here](#), presented a moment of opportunity. Graduations are moments of past reflection, but are also moments for looking forward. President Steger’s discourse to this point contained no backward looking second guesses, but the nature of graduation speeches presents him with the opportunity to eulogize the murdered while concomitantly looking forward and celebrating the lives of the recent graduates. He did both in this speech.

Steger could not ignore 4/16 in this commencement. It was a moment that would allow him to speak to both the past and to the future, to put an ending to one phase of the crisis the

University and his office had endured. He recognized that “our celebrations and our joy are subdued in recognition of the great tragedy that befell our university, our community on April 16th. Our minds still reel from the violence, and our hearts still ache for those slain and injured and their families and friends.”⁸⁴ The slain are neither forgotten nor denied tribute: “They wanted to make their mark as individuals, to be a part of the greater world and make it better. . . .”⁸⁵

The slain were “caring, kind, compassionate and loving. They were serious about their goals, but fun-loving in pursuit of those aspirations. They were hard working, yet enjoyed their relaxation.” He listed numerous pursuits: horseback riding, tennis, kayaking, volleyball, basketball, lacrosse, music, and dancing. He listed points of origin: Blacksburg and Roanoke, “throughout Virginia and the world.” Crucial to this speech, “Each [slain student] was gifted and talented and unique. They were Hokies.”⁸⁶ As Hokies, the virtues and qualities, the activities, and the origins of the slain are the same as the living. In one sense, President Steger was describing not the dead, but his living audience; he thus served to more tightly knit together Hokies across the globe, showcasing a common, shared humanity.

Enlarging this conception, he mentioned the [Hokie Nation](#), enlarging a term once reserved for football fans filling [Lane Stadium](#), where school spirit and support are [legendary](#). President Steger said that, “we have seen that phrase take on a greater and deeper meaning. It is one of a community coming together—yes, to mourn and pour out our grief, but also coming together to help each other, to lift others’ burdens while our own weighed so heavily upon us.” The new Nation is enlarged considerably. Students and fans, yes, but now grief counselors, faculty, and staff: “They are Hokies.” The Virginia Tech and Blacksburg Police, and the local Sheriffs: “The are Hokies.” The Virginia Tech and Blacksburg rescue squads: “The are Hokies.”

Members of [Hokies United](#), who worked to bring the candlelight vigil, the noon moment of silence, and the memorials on the drill field: “The are Hokies.” Speaking to these Hokies, to returning students, and to alumni, President Steger moves away from Nation to something with deeper resonance, “We are indeed the Virginia Tech *Family*.”⁸⁷

Past actions recognized, President Steger now moves to the future. Referring to moments of shared [support](#) in [America](#) and across the globe, he said that it “is heartening that these lights of compassion and care have shone through the deep darkness of our suffering. This day is also one of those lights, one of those beacons, guiding us toward the future. In the lyrical language of the psalms we hear that ‘weeping may endure fore a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’ Our hearts have been broken, but our spirit—the Hokie Spirit, which has captured the admiration of millions—remains strong. . . .”⁸⁸

Drawing upon the memories past, but looking steadfastly forward, he continues in a vein reminiscent of commencement addresses:

How can we not be resolute and determined to go forward when we are reminded so poignantly. . . of why Virginia Tech is here and what it stands for? At our core, we are Virginia Tech. We are a great university that has a special role to play in the world. [T]he Hokie spirit is indomitable. Let our most lasting memorial to those who were snatched from our midst be our achievements. Let us live our professional and personal lives in a manner that moves the world forward. Is that not what it means to “Invent the future”? Please know that moving on is not the same as forgetting. We shall not forget.

Let April 16th be on our future calendars. Yes, to remember those precious members of our community who we lost. . . . But also to renew our commitment to learning and growing . . . to rededicate ourselves to being outstanding citizens of this great nation and

the world. . . to be a bright light on the horizon of tomorrow that will chase away the darkness of our fears, to show the world once again that We . . . are . . . Virginia Tech!

And, to *all* of our students here today . . . I wish I could reach out and hug each one of you. *You* are the reason I get out of bed in the morning. *You* are my passion. . . . *You* are the future . . . and your achievements will be felt around the globe.

I...could...not...possibly...be more proud of you than I am at this moment.⁸⁹

Narrative Trajectory: An End at Hand

Some researchers suggest that the major function of a president's response to a perceived crisis is to redefine the situation in terms with which the public can understand or identify. The manner in which identification and redefinition occurs is often through "configuring the situation in terms of socially-sanctioned myths."⁹⁰ For President Steger, this involved invoking We Are Hokies. We are Virginia Tech. He worked into familiar ideas—Hokie identity; Hokie Nation; Virginia Tech Community—new associations: A will to prevail, to overcome, to mourn together, and to grow together.

President Steger had numerous opportunities to point fingers, to scapegoat, to lay blame. Instead he focused not on contention, but on community; not attacking a viciously cynical press, but on expressing praiseworthy values; not on ripping further the torn fabric of the Hokie Nation, but on building unified visions of value. I think his success at doing this can be seen on many levels, but perhaps the sentiments are best expressed on this site developed so that Hokies could express their views about President Steger and the crisis.

[<http://www.wesupportvt.com/>]

President Steger projects the closure for this narrative into the future. The story is not yet finished. The manner in which the narration is concluded acts to transfer the meaning and final closure of the narrative onto the future actions of members of the Virginia Tech family, or the larger Hokie Nation. Such a projection is weighty, and not without risks. Hayden White has stressed the moral burden of this type of projection: “‘the weight of meaning’ of the events recounted is ‘thrown forward’ onto a future just beyond the immediate present,” and in light of potential responses to the murders, onto “a future fraught with moral judgment. . . .”⁹¹ President Steger set the tone throughout the tragedy; the responsibility for future action now resides with the Virginia Tech family.

Other important sites:

Photo galleries: <http://www.vt.edu/remember/photos/>

Memorial fund: <http://www.vt.edu/fund/>

New Memorial Dedication: http://www.vt.edu/remember/memorial_dedication/

Archive of 16 April 2007: <http://april16archive.org/>

18 August 2007 Memorial Dedication: <http://www.vt.edu/remember/index.php>

Notes

¹ Charles Steger, “VA Tech Shootings,” *The Situation Room* 16 April 2007, 4:00p.m. Obtained Lexis-Nexis database.

² <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9636137>

³ These included all public statements from 16 April 2007 through 11 May 2007 that I could obtain: speeches, press conference remarks, interviews, letters. I did not include excerpts from news articles.

⁴ For a fuller treatment of this topic see, Jim A. Kuypers, *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in the Post-Cold War World*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).

⁵ Amos Kiewe, ed., *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), xvii.

⁶ Theodore O. Windt, “The Presidency and Speeches on International Crises: Repeating the Rhetorical Past,” *Essays in Presidential Rhetoric*, ed. Theodore Windt and Beth Ingold, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1987), 125-134.

⁷ Windt, “Presidency and Speeches,” 126.

⁸ Windt, “Presidency and Speeches,” 127. The constrained nature of presidential utterances is reaffirmed by Windt in *Presidents and Protesters: Political Rhetoric in the 1960s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990). Here Windt wrote: Presidents “are free to define issues within the context of their political beliefs, traditions, circumstances, past history, and political affiliation. Once having spoken for the public record, they have to defend their words and the policies that issued from them. Other politicians, journalists, and the public . . . demand consistency” (4).

⁹ For a detailed explanation of how a rhetorical situation works, see Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The

Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1-14. Also see Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Political Rhetoric,” *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981), 225-248; Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*, ed. Eugene E. White (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 21-38; Marilyn J. Young, “Lloyd F. Bitzer: Rhetorical Situation, Public Knowledge, and Audience Dynamics,” in *Twentieth Century Roots of Rhetorical Criticism*, Jim A. Kuypers and Andrew King, eds., Praeger, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001, p. 275-301. For an even greater stress on the creative potential of the speaker in a rhetorical situation, see Richard E. Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 6 (1973), 154-161.

¹⁰Jim A. Kuypers, Marilyn J. Young, and Michael K. Launer, “Of Mighty Mice and Meek Men: Contextual Reconstruction of the Shootdown of Iran Air 655,” *Southern Communication Journal* 59.4 (1994): 294-306.

¹¹Kuypers, Young, and Launer, 294-306.

¹²Windt, “Presidency and Speeches,” 128.

¹³Bonnie J. Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 301.

¹⁴Dow, 303.

¹⁵ For a more detailed look at this concept see, Jim A. Kuypers, Marilyn J. Young, and Michael K. Launer, “Composite Narrative, Authoritarian Discourse, and the Soviet Response to the Destruction of Iran Air Flight 655,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87.3 (2001): 305-320.

¹⁶ Charles Steger, “VA Tech Shootings,” *The Situation Room* 16 April 2007, 4:00p.m.

Obtained Lexis-Nexis database. In this, and in press reports and speeches that follow, I modified the paragraph structure for ease of reading.

¹⁷ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

¹⁸ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

¹⁹ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²⁰ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²¹ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²² Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²³ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²⁴ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²⁵ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²⁶ Steger, “VA Tech Shootings.”

²⁷ “Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech University [sic], Discusses Shooting on Campus,” *CBS Evening News*, , 6:30p.m., 16 April 2007, CBS News Transcripts. Obtained Lexis-Nexis database.

²⁸ “Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech University [sic], Discusses Shooting on Campus.”

²⁹ “Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech University [sic], Discusses Shooting on Campus.”

³⁰ “ABC News Now/Special Report #6,” ABC News Now 16 April 2007, 7:42PM. Obtained Lexis-Nexis database.

³¹ “ABC News Now/Special Report #6.”

³² “ABC News Now/Special Report #6.”

³³ “ABC News Now/Special Report #6.”

³⁴ Michael Osborn, "Rhetorical Depiction," Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse, eds. Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1986) 82.

³⁵ Osborn, 82.

³⁶ Michael Calvin McGee, "Secular Humanism: A Radical Reading of Culture 'Industry' Productions," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1.1 (1984): 8.

³⁷ Steger, "VA Tech Shootings."

³⁸ Steger, "VA Tech Shootings."

³⁹ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech University [sic], Discusses Shooting on Campus."

⁴⁰ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech University [sic], Discusses Shooting on Campus."

⁴¹ "The Investigation; The Guns; Treating the Wounded; Students Coping; Witness To Tragedy," *American Morning*, CNN, 17 April 2007, 6:00 a.m. Obtained Lexis-Nexis database. Time of interview approximate.

⁴² "The Investigation; The Guns; Treating the Wounded; Students Coping; Witness To Tragedy."

⁴³ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech, Discusses the Shootings on Campus," *Today*, NBC News Transcripts (17 April 2007). Obtained from Lexis-Nexis database.

⁴⁴ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech, Discusses the Shootings on Campus."

⁴⁵ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech, Discusses the Shootings on Campus."

⁴⁶ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech, Discusses the Shootings on Campus."

⁴⁷ "Charles Steger, President of Virginia Tech and Law Enforcement Officials Discuss the Case," *Today*, NBC News Transcripts (17 April 2007). Obtained from Lexis-Nexis database.

⁴⁸ “ABC ‘Good Morning America’ Interview with Virginia Tech University [sic] President Charles Steger; Interviewer: Diane Sawyer,” *Federal News Service* (17 April 2007). Obtained from Lexis-Nexis database.

⁴⁹ “ABC ‘Good Morning America’ Interview with Virginia Tech University [Sic] President Charles Steger; Interviewer: Diane Sawyer.”

⁵⁰ “ABC ‘Good Morning America’ Interview with Virginia Tech University [Sic] President Charles Steger; Interviewer: Diane Sawyer.”

⁵¹ “ABC ‘Good Morning America’ Interview with Virginia Tech University [Sic] President Charles Steger; Interviewer: Diane Sawyer.”

⁵² “ABC ‘Good Morning America’ Interview with Virginia Tech University [sic] President Charles Steger; Interviewer: Diane Sawyer.”

⁵³ “Convocation Remarks,” *Virginia Tech Magazine*, Memorial Issue (May 2007)
<http://www.vtmagazine.vt.edu/memorial07/convocation.html> Last accessed 10 September 2007.

⁵⁴ “Convocation Remarks.”

⁵⁵ J. Richard Chase, “The Classical Conception of Epideictic,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 47.3 (1961): 293-300

⁵⁶ Lawrence W. Rosenfield, “The Practical Celebration of Epideictic,” *Rhetoric in Transition*. Ed. Eugene E. White, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1980) 134.

⁵⁷ Rosenfield, 135.

⁵⁸ Michael F. Carter, “The Ritual Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric: The Case of Socrates’ Funeral Oration,” *Rhetorica* 9.3 (1991): 209-232

⁵⁹ Carter, 212.

⁶⁰ Dale L. Sullivan, "The Epideictic Rhetoric of Science," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 5.3 (1991): 229-245.

⁶¹ Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly* 33.4 (1985), 284-298.

⁶² Condit, 289.

⁶³ Bernard K. Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16.2 (1983), 81.

⁶⁴ Carter, 226, 227.

⁶⁵ Cynthia Sheard, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric." *College English* 58.7 (1996), 775

⁶⁶ Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 7.

⁶⁷ Mary E. Stuckey, *Slipping the Surly Bonds: Reagan's Challenger Address*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 16.

⁶⁸ Condit, 288.

⁶⁹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* Ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1978), 20.

⁷⁰ Charles W. Steger, E-mail to Virginia Tech, (20 April 2007, 7:12:19 AM EDT).

⁷¹ Steger, E-mail to Virginia Tech.

⁷² Steger, E-mail to Virginia Tech.

⁷³ Charles W. Steger, "A Message from President Charles W. Steger," (21 April 2007, 2:30p.m.)

<http://www.vt.edu/remember/archive/> Last accessed 10 September 2007.

⁷⁴ Steger, “A Message from President Charles W. Steger.”

⁷⁵ Sara Hebel, “A President’s Reflections on a Tragedy: A Q&A with Charles W. Steger of Virginia Tech,” Today’s News, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (26 April 2007)

<http://chronicle.com/free/2007/04/2007042603n.htm> Last accessed 10 September 2007.

⁷⁶ Hebel.

⁷⁷ Hebel.

⁷⁸ Hebel.

⁷⁹ Hebel.

⁸⁰ Charles W. Steger, Letter to Families of Virginia Tech Students, 7 May 2007. Letter in possession of the author.

⁸¹ Steger, Letter to Families of Virginia Tech Students.

⁸² Steger, Letter to Families of Virginia Tech Students.

⁸³ Steger, Letter to Families of Virginia Tech Students.

⁸⁴ Charles W. Steger, Commencement Address, Virginia Tech, 11 May 2007. I have changed the paragraph structure here and in following passages for ease of reading.

⁸⁵ Steger, Commencement Address.

⁸⁶ Steger, Commencement Address.

⁸⁷ Steger, Commencement Address.

⁸⁸ Steger, Commencement Address.

⁸⁹ Steger, Commencement Address.

⁹⁰David C. Klope, “Defusing a Foreign Policy Crisis: Myth and Victimage in Reagan’s 1983 Lebanon/Grenada Address,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 50 (1986): 348.

⁹¹Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 25. Quotes found in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 1967).