



**University of Ottawa Imaging Research**  
**Summary Report**

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**March 23, 2004**

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## Summary of Key Findings

*The following pages summarize the results of ten focus groups conducted by Martin Redfern and Emmanuelle Savaria for the University of Ottawa in March 2004. The groups were designed to examine issues surrounding the proposed University of Ottawa logo. A full discussion of methodology is found in the last section of this summary report.*

As with any new logo implementation, the proposed University of Ottawa logo enjoys certain advantages and faces certain challenges. This research has reached seven basic conclusions regarding these advantages and challenges:

1. The proposed logo will not be confused visually with any other existing logos, whether for universities or other organizations. The logo formulation is unique and distinctive.
2. The proposed logo contains a pictogram that evokes images of tradition, strength and prosperity, combined with a typography that evokes a sense of modernity, youth and innovation. These two alternate themes are complementary and synergistic.
3. The proposed logo will require contextual support in early stages to help readers make a mental connection to the University of Ottawa. This connection is currently not obvious to many people outside the National Capital Region, and will require support and reinforcement.
4. “u Ottawa” in particular - and most specifically the lowercase “u” - is an uncommon typographic formulation for a university name, and will require time and support before it is widely and instantly understood outside the National Capital Region.
5. The brand message (“Canada’s university”) will attract attention and generate interest. Contextual support is also needed for the brand message to minimize the impression in some minds that the University is over-reaching or being pretentious.
6. Compared to the currently-used Coat of Arms, the proposed logo is significantly more popular with respondents, better at communicating key brand attributes, and more easily identified with the University of Ottawa.
7. The logo package as a whole (including the brand message) is ambitious, insofar as it makes significant departures from traditional formulations and challenges readers. The reward, once the logo has overcome early stages of unfamiliarity, will be a logo which simultaneously transmits a message of tradition and modernity, history and youth, reputation and innovation.

## Overall Logo Assessment

When the logo pictogram and uOttawa text are seen together, respondents generally recognize and appreciate the mix of tradition and modernity. While the text is seen as fresh and young, the pictogram is seen as reputable, traditional and reliable. Together they transmit a dichotomous message which most respondents see as *complementary* rather than *contradictory*.

Respondents use words like *clean, simple, clear, modern, sober, elegant, and professional* to describe the overall logo design. They also raise concerns, however, about constituent parts of the logo, as discussed in later sections of this report.



The overall logo suggests “University of Ottawa” to somewhat more than one-half of respondents. This is more than the number who reach this conclusion based on either the typography or the pictogram alone. Used in conjunction with the brand message (“Canada’s university”), the mental connection with the University of Ottawa is made much more often.

The colours used in the logo (The University of Ottawa’s traditional gray and garnet) are seen as appropriate, serious and dignified, and most respondents accept those colours without complaint. Some respondents see a need for more colour, however, and are generally pleased when they see the burgundy text of the brand message juxtaposed against the logo. The use of different shades of gray for “u” and “Ottawa” in the typography clearly creates a separation of these elements and almost completely avoids any confusion regarding whether this is one or two textual elements.

When asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed logo design (including pictogram and typography), respondents say the key strengths are simplicity, power, the mixture of modern with tradition, the appropriate colours and the innovative text. The weaknesses of the design are considered to be the lowercase “u”, bland colours, the outside frame of the pictogram, confusion about the meaning, and perceived coldness. These comments are laid out in the following table.

<b>Verbatim Participant Comments on the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Proposed University of Ottawa Logo – Sorted by Themes</b>	
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Simplicity (n=18)</b> Simple Direct Not cluttered, organized, concise Easy to remember Clean Sober	<b>Lowercase “u” / u Ottawa (n=9)</b> Colour and size Should be “U” Too casual Grammatically incorrect Should be more spaced out
<b>Solidity and Power (n=15)</b> Solid and powerful Can rely on Image and Letters are prestigious Roof means “protection” & “reassurance” Professional, serious Reputable and integrity	<b>Colours (n=7)</b> Bland, monotone No contrast Don't like colours I would kill for some colour.
<b>Modern and Traditional Aspects (n=10)</b> Modern Creative, innovative, different	<b>Pictogram Frame (n=6)</b> Modern frame does not match Takes too much space
<b>Colours (n=7)</b> Traditional Easy to read Warm Fresh and calm Match between colour of “u” and picture	<b>Confusion (n=6)</b> Not clear meaning Contradiction Too complex No link between image and text Vague
<b>Text (n=5)</b> “Ottawa” stands out Like the “u” in u Ottawa Multi audience, bilingual	<b>Cold (n=3)</b> Too muted, cold Not dynamic Static
<b>Other Strengths (n=7)</b> Welcoming, sense of belonging, inclusion Web feel “Bleeds” Canadian, International Appropriate for University of Ottawa Sense of learning and knowledge	<b>Other Weaknesses (n=4)</b> Picture is too small Too traditional Intimidating Font could have been more traditional

## Typography: “u Ottawa”

The style and presentation of “u Ottawa”, even when it is not clearly understood, is seen to be modern, young, and simple. This style is seen as appropriate to young people. The use of a lowercase “u” led many to think of Web-based information and communication, including the (correct) assumption that this was also a web address.

Furthermore, “u Ottawa” is not generally seen to have a linguistic bias – it is seen as either bilingual or, more often, non-lingual.

While most participants in the National Capital Region had little doubt that “u Ottawa”, as used in the proposed logo, is intended to denote the University of Ottawa, this terminology will require additional communications efforts if it is to become current outside the NCR.

In Toronto and Montreal, respondents experienced significant difficulty identifying “u Ottawa” with the University of Ottawa. As the following table best illustrates, “u Ottawa” was often misinterpreted in Toronto and Montreal.



Unaided Association of “u Ottawa” with the University of Ottawa				
	Ottawa	Toronto	Montreal	Total
Participants who <b>did</b> associate “u Ottawa” with University of Ottawa	15	9	6	30
Participants who <b>did not</b> associate “u Ottawa” with University of Ottawa	4	9	11	24
Total	19	18	17	54

It is important to note, however, that “u Ottawa” was not mistaken for *another* entity, but simply left respondents in these cities without an immediate sense of meaning. While respondents offered a number of incorrect interpretations of “u Ottawa” – including tourism, city government and federal government associations – these were generally found only after some mental searching. In other words, while the University of Ottawa does not always leap to mind when people see “u Ottawa”, there is no other well known institution which comes to mind either. This implies that there is *share of mind* available for “u Ottawa” to occupy unopposed.

Briefly, the reasons why “u Ottawa” does not always evoke the University of Ottawa are as follows. First, neither Anglophones nor Francophones are used to hearing this construction – which embodies an abbreviation joined directly to a proper name – to signify a University. Most would expect to see a preposition (such as “of” or “de”) between the two words. Second, the lower case “u” does not lead immediately to an

association with “university”. Respondents expect the word “university”, when part of a title, to be capitalized. Discomfort and confusion surrounding the lowercase “u” was the most consistent negative comment emerging from the focus groups.

Finally, there is a largely unhelpful association between the lowercase “u” in “u Ottawa” and short form slang versions of the word “you”. Even among Francophones, there was a significant tendency to see “u” in this fashion, and to assume that “u Ottawa” posits some relationship between the individual reader and the City of Ottawa or the Federal Government. This point is especially salient outside Ottawa. Inside the NCR, where people see the word “Ottawa” many times daily, there was a tendency to see and correctly parse the meaning of the “u”. Outside the NCR, where the word “Ottawa” is necessarily more novel, there is a tendency to focus on that word and consequently think of the City itself or the federal government for whom “Ottawa” is a sometimes pejorative synonym.

Even among those who experienced difficulties in receiving the full meaning of the “u Ottawa” typography, a significant number said the formulation was intriguing, eye-catching and/or raised questions for the reader.

The creative challenge in the short term will be to ensure that readers are drawn or led to the correct conclusion regarding the intended meaning of “u Ottawa”, until such time as the phrase comes into common usage and is widely understood.

## Pictogram

The pictogram for the proposed logo is extremely efficient in transmitting mental images of power, strength, tradition, trustworthiness and prosperity.

These associations stem directly from two sources. First, there is a common assumption that the pictogram represents Greek or Roman architecture and, for many, the Greek Parthenon in particular. This evokes many ideas of tradition, power and classical culture. Second, the building is seen to be strong and solid - a permanent and reliable presence which has and will stand the test of time.

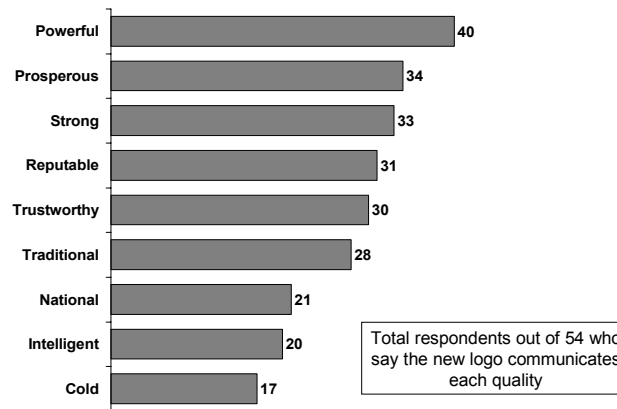
In transmitting this sense of strong tradition, the pictogram



foregoes the ability to project a sense of dynamism, innovation, or energy. This is not surprising given the strong association with ancient cultures and architecture, but it is balanced, as noted elsewhere, by the modern tone of the typography.

### Adjectives Most Often Associated with Pictogram

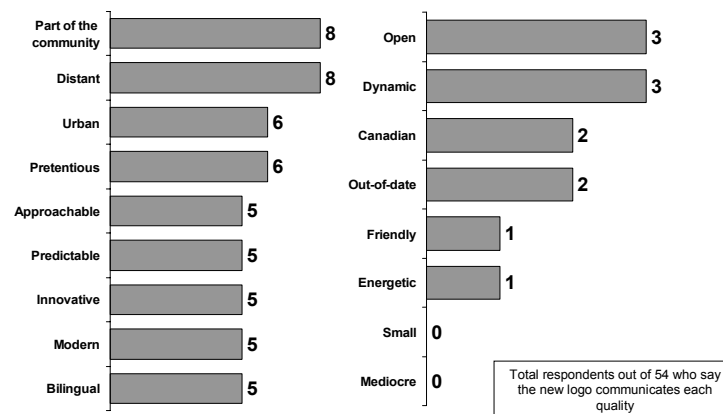
Actual number of respondents who chose each adjective from a list provided by the moderator



The pictogram also does not explicitly communicate friendliness or approachability. Few respondents found the pictogram welcoming or warm, and about one-half found it *cold*.

### Adjectives Least Often Associated with Pictogram

Actual number of respondents who chose each adjective from a list provided by the moderator



The associations with ancient culture, museums and libraries lead many to see *intelligence* in the pictogram. The perceived *power* of the organization led many to conclude it must also be *national*, as are many powerful institutions.

Given the overall image of strength, history and reliability created by the pictogram, it is not surprising that it was often thought to represent a financial institution, a law court, a

library or museum. A smaller number saw a building company or hotel chain. The pictogram does not necessarily create an association with learning or education in the minds of most viewers.

That said, there was little or no association made between the building in the pictogram and any *real* building other than the Parthenon. While columns of the pictogram (when seen alone) might reasonably be supposed to represent a number of different famous buildings in Canada, respondents did not make any such associations. Even in Ottawa, the columns of the pictogram were seen as idealized representations of a certain style of architecture (usually Greek), rather than an image of a specific building. Thus, while the pictogram does not remind most people of Tabaret Hall, it is not confused with any other famous Canadian buildings either.

In this context, it should be noted that the frame of the logo was not generally seen by respondents as *part of a building*. In other words, the building respondents saw was solely the columns, steps and roof evident in the centre of the pictogram image. The frame, representing the outline and dome of Tabaret Hall, was not mentioned by respondents. This partly explains the frequent association with the Parthenon.

## The Current University of Ottawa Logo

When shown the current University of Ottawa logo (Coat of Arms), respondents use words such as *busy* and *complicated*. They say the logo evokes images of royalty, tradition, heraldry, higher education, government, hospitals, and private clubs.

Most importantly, the logo does not evoke any specific associations with any particular organizations, including the University of Ottawa. Even in Ottawa, only one participant – a student at the University of Ottawa - actually recognized the Coat of Arms as the University of Ottawa logo.

There is no question that, in the eyes of most respondents, the proposed University of Ottawa logo is a significant improvement. It is preferred because respondents say it is cleaner, simpler, more modern, and more specific to the University of Ottawa. The change in logo is seen to reflect a desire by the University of Ottawa to be more modern, innovative and relevant.

## Brand Message: “Canada’s University”

In most groups, the brand message (“Canada’s university / L’Université canadienne”) was tested. Responses were not dissimilar to those seen when this brand message was first tested in 2003.

This brand message is seen as bold and proud, and never fails to engender interest and discussion. Often, respondents reproach the University of Ottawa for stretching credulity, as they believe the brand message implies that the University of Ottawa is the best university in Canada, or possibly the best known. These respondents often feel this title would rightly belong to the University of Toronto or McGill. In addition, there is a sense that the singularity of the brand message is exclusive and does not leave place for other Canadian universities. Sometimes, words such as *arrogant*, *pompous* or *pretentious* are used to describe this brand message.

However, the tone of these discussions is extremely important to note. While there is commonly a sense that the University of Ottawa is being bold and aggressive, and quite possibly too much so, there is no real sense of shock or outrage. On the contrary, while respondents say they expect *other people* to feel offended or excluded by the brand message, no respondents appear to be shocked or outraged themselves. Indeed, in Toronto, there was a sense that respondents were almost impressed that the University would dare use such strong language to describe itself.

Two final points regarding the brand message relate to language. First, bilingual respondents sometimes claimed that the English and French phrases are not parallel; that the translation is inexact. If true, this would be of particular importance in more bilingual centres such as Ottawa and Montreal. Second, Ontario respondents (usually unilingual) were sometimes confused or annoyed by the placement of French text above the English text. They assume that the first language listed would depend on the audience, and that English would be used first in primarily English-speaking provinces like Ontario, while French would be used first in the province of Québec. Some felt that the ‘superior’ position of the French text sent a message about the University of Ottawa - specifically that it is more French than English. Also important, they felt that English-speaking international students would be discouraged by the prominent position of French in the brand message. Although a certain amount of linguistic intolerance lies at the heart of these statements, in Toronto they were also founded somewhat upon poor knowledge of the bilingual mission of the University of Ottawa.

An important strength of the brand message, however, is that its presence resolves all uncertainty or ambiguity which may linger with the logo itself. Once the brand message is added to the pictogram/uOttawa formulation, respondents are in no doubt as to who the image represents. In the short term, it would seem prudent to include the brand message with the proposed logo whenever possible.

## **Methodology**

The results presented in this report are based on 10 focus groups conducted with a total of 54 respondents during the week of March 15, 2004. Four focus groups were conducted in Ottawa, three in Toronto and three in Montreal. Two of the Ottawa groups and all of the groups in Montreal were conducted in French by a Francophone moderator. The other groups were conducted in English by an Anglophone moderator.

Recruits for the focus groups were between 25 and 60 years of age and possessed at least some post-secondary education. They were screened for previous participation in focus groups and for basic ability to think and articulate clearly.

Each focus group lasted between 60 and 75 minutes, and included the completion of a workbook by each participant, as well as open discussion regarding visual stimuli. Respondents were shown, in order, the proposed logo pictogram, the proposed logo typography, the proposed logo in full, the current logo pictogram, and finally the full logo with the brand message.

The research was commissioned by the University of Ottawa and conducted by Martin Redfern and Emmanuelle Savaria. They may be reached at [www.martinredfern.com](http://www.martinredfern.com).