

# The City of Owasso Character Initiative

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A Case Study

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*7 May, 2012*

DENNIS CHEATHAM

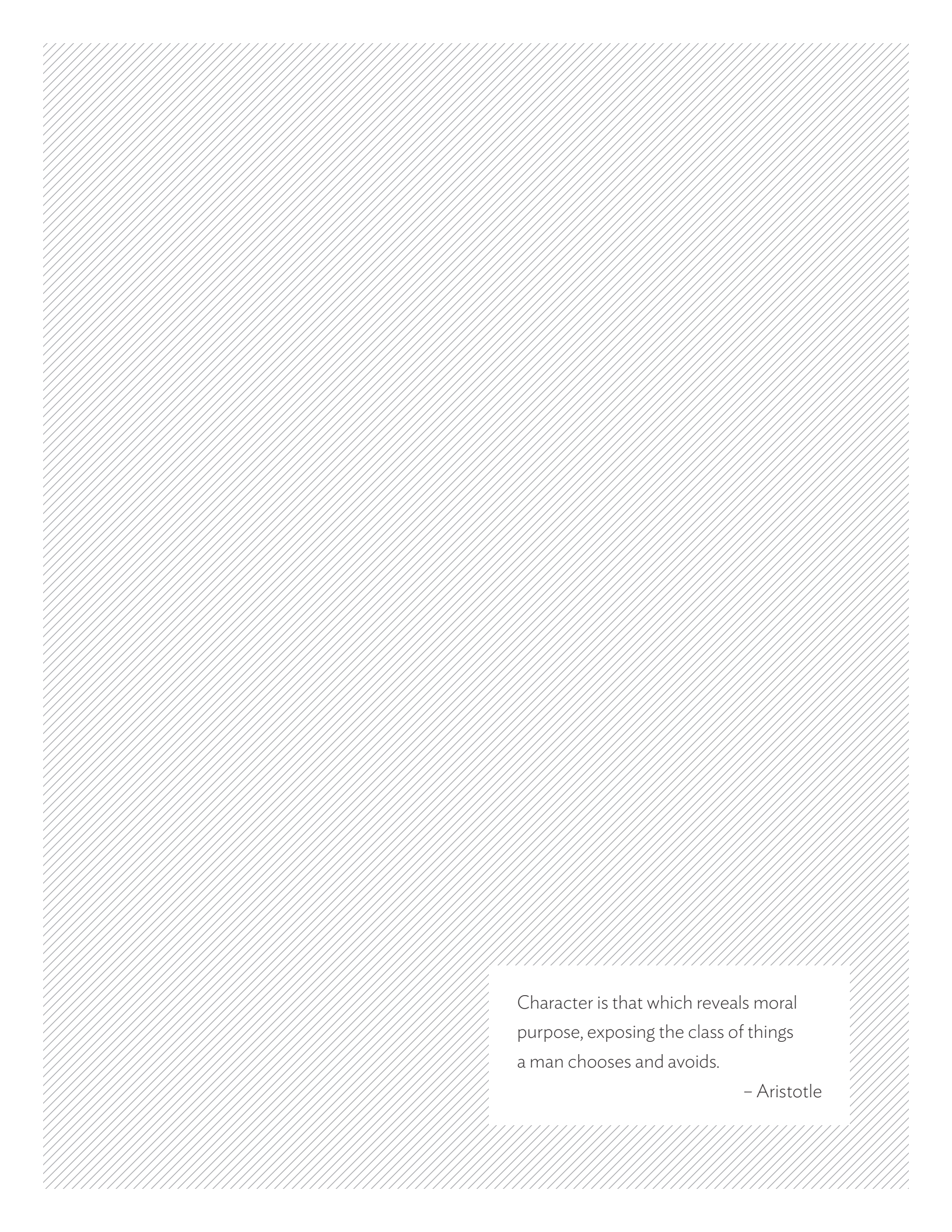
JOHN HICKS

MICHELLE KEEFER

XUHAO YANG







Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses and avoids.

– Aristotle



# Contents

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SUMMARY	9
A Case Study Overview	
OUR TEAM	13
Collaborative Research	
CONTEXTS	15
Owasso, a City of Character	
FRAMING	21
A Deductive Approach	
METHODS	27
Operationalizing Knowledge	
ANALYSIS	33
Uncovering Meaning	
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	39
What We Learned	



# Colophon

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Work for this case study on the City of Owasso Character Initiative was conducted between January and May 2012. Our research team, The Honey Badgers, were assembled by Professor Keith Owens for his Collaborative Design Research Studio course at the University of North Texas for the Spring 2012 semester of classes at the Design Research Center in Dallas, Texas.

## SPECIAL THANKS

Keith Owens; Michael Gibson; Team Wolverine: Rebeca Carranza, Holly Cole, Jeff Joiner, and Tim Woodring; Ms. Michele Dempster, Owasso Character Coordinator; Rodney Ray, Owasso City Manager; Warren Lehr, Owasso Assistant City Manager; Butch and Barbara Cheatham; Harry and Beverly, McDonald's Owasso Ambassadors; Ron's Hamburgers in Owasso, Compadres Mexican Grill and the Citizens of Owasso.

This book was set in the typefaces *Ideal Sans* by Hoefler & Frere-Jones and *Cala* by Dieter Hofrichter.







# Summary

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A Case Study Overview

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**SUMMARY**

In 2002, the city of Owasso, Oklahoma inducted a city-wide campaign known as the Character Initiative in their effort to become a “City of Character.” The Character Initiative is comprised of 48 character-driven words and definitions, promoting character traits of servitude and self-improvement via outdoor banner signs and city utility bill inserts.

Our team examined the Owasso Character Initiative within a theoretical



John Hicks and XuHao Yang in a research design session.

framework of virtue ethics—which proposes that morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual—under the hypothesis that the Character Initiative is a rhetorical strategy to mold the citizens of Owasso into model citizens by suggesting ways in which they interact within the community. Within this framework, ethnographic research methods such as observations, interviews, and surveys were employed to test the efficacy of the campaign in its

current state by focusing on the level of awareness and acceptance by the citizens of Owasso.

In a class-based charrette, persona based modeling was used as a guide to predict potential areas of improvement for the current implementation of the Owasso Character Initiative. After we defined five key personas

to represent the city’s citizens and assigning those personas to the session’s participants, the following questions were addressed:



Charrette participants Rebeca Carranza, Tim Woodring, Holly Cole, Keith Owens and Jeff Joiner (left to right).

*Do the current character words and definitions represent and resonate with the personas representing Owasso?*

*What places do the different personas patronize? Is there an overlap?*

*What mediums are these persona groups confronted with in the places they patronize?*

*How can the Owasso Character Initiative be implemented into effective mediums other than the outdoor banners and utility bill inserts which are being currently used?*

The solution and discussion which stemmed from the charrette experience informed the formation and implementation of our field research in Owasso as we researched the initiative's efficacy in both the citizens' awareness of it and to what degrees they identified with its physical forms and the messages it communicated. After conducting our field research in Owasso by speaking with City of Owasso policy makers, we learned that the stated goal for the Initiative is that the citizens of Owasso would be aware of the Character Initiative and the value of character in the lives of its citizens. The final stage of our field research included the work of conducting surveys of the citizens of Owasso on the Initiative and how aware they were of it and of the concept of moral character in general. We can conclude that the campaign has been successful in meeting the goals that have been set for it.



Dennis Cheatham with one of the Owasso Character Initiative street signs.

In conclusion, while the campaign may be successful when measured against the goals which have been set for it, we feel that the city of Owasso may be missing key opportunities to improve the campaign on levels like aesthetics, linguistics, logistical placements and media positioning and other dynamics which could test and elevate its cultural relevancy, specific to the citizens of Owasso so that it may resonate with them more effectively on a personal level. More research is needed, however, to determine the lasting effects of the campaign and its degree of adoption by the citizens of Owasso.



Michelle Keefer directs the Charrette session.



# Our Team

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## Collaborative Research



DENNIS CHEATHAM

Dennis is a designer, design researcher and educator pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in Design-Innovation Studies at the University of North Texas. He graduated from Texas Tech University in 1998 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Communication Design and a Bachelor of Arts in English-Creative Writing. Dennis's current work can be found online at [dennischeatham.com](http://dennischeatham.com).



JOHN HICKS

John is a visual communicator, educator, and design researcher. He currently operates as an independent design professional and Teaching Fellow, while pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in Design with a concentration in innovation studies and design research at the University of North Texas. John's portfolio of work can be accessed at [johnallenhicks.com](http://johnallenhicks.com).



K. MICHELLE KEEFER

Michelle graduated in 2008 from Texas State University in San Marcos with a Bachelor's Degree from the College of Mass Communication in Advertising, and a minor in Psychology. She is currently a full time mom, wife, marketing and public relations executive and graduate student at the University of North Texas at the College of Visual Arts and Design in Design with a concentration in Innovation Studies and a minor in Marketing.



XUHAO YANG

XuHao Yang is from China, and is a Master of Fine Arts degree candidate in Design with a concentration in Innovation Studies at the University of North Texas. Before coming to the United States for graduate school he was a journalist, editor, and designer working for almost nine years at *GuangZhou Daily*, a Chinese newspaper.



# Contexts

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Owasso, a City of Character

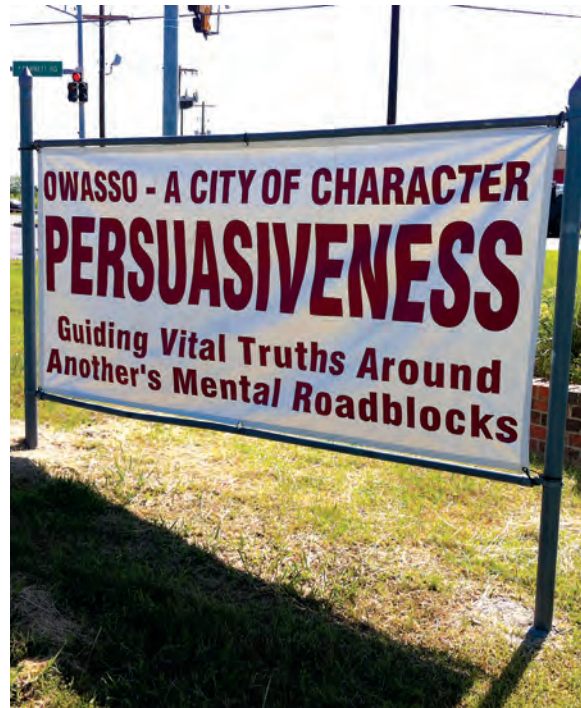
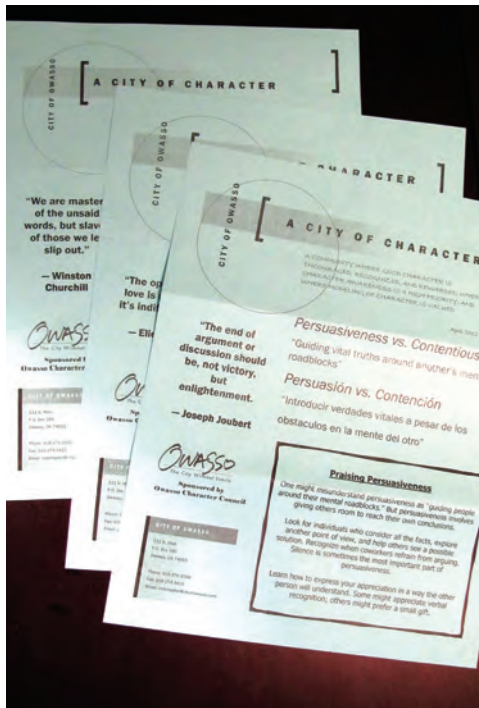
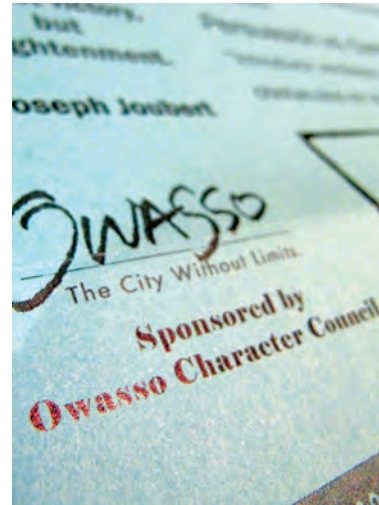
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**THE CITY OF OWASSO  
CHARACTER INITIATIVE**

The instance examined in this case study is the Character Initiative campaign in Owasso, Oklahoma. The character initiative, created by the organization Character First, is an aspirational model of how to be a positive influence for others. The initiative is comprised of 48 character words—rotating on a monthly basis—focusing on self-improvement and service to others, along with customized definitions outlining how to interpret and operationalize those words in personal acts of character. The initiative’s message is currently being deployed in Owasso via outdoor banner signs and utility bill inserts.

The outdoor banner signs are placed in five locations at the perimeter of the city, at major intersections, facing outward from the city and greeting those that enter. The banners are approximately 8’x4’ and consist of a white field containing the character word of the month and its definition in red lettering. The utility bill inserts contain more detailed information about the current month’s character word, definition and suggestions on how to put that word into action in the citizens’ daily lives.





## THE CITY OF OWASSO

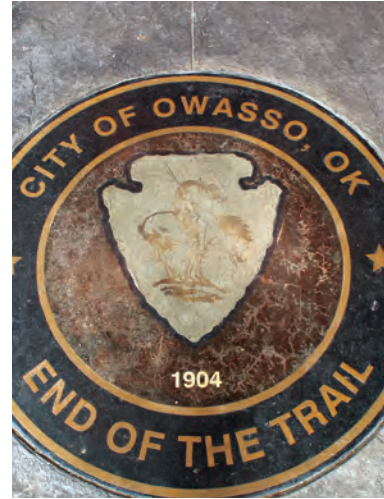
The City of Owasso is located in the northeast quadrant of the state of Oklahoma in the central United States, 13.8 miles northeast of the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Originally a settlement which grew in population because of the railroad line which reached its terminus near where modern-day Main Street is located, the city was officially founded in 1900.

Since its founding as a town in what was then Indian Territory, Owasso has experienced significant growth in residents and in commerce, swelling to a population of approximately 38,000. Since 2002, Owasso city leaders have focused their efforts on making the city desirable to commercial investment and since 2007, over two million square feet of retail space has been built. Over this span, businesses like Office Depot, Sam's Club, Old Navy, Lowe's, Target, Starbucks and Home Depot along with regional stores and restaurants have established locations in the growing city alongside existing local businesses. The city has seen the addition of two regional hospitals and several golf courses and master-planned communities over the past ten years. This growth has established Owasso as a regional center for shopping and services.



Oklahoma state map with Owasso highlighted.

The city's citizens are largely Caucasian and out of the 81 people we randomly surveyed, a majority of Owasso residents have lived in the town more than ten years. The city features a mixture of neighborhood developments with homes modestly spaced apart sporting stone and brick construction. Further away from the city center, residences are more spread out in their spacing and in some areas, feature significant acreage and in many cases, livestock and horses suggesting the area's agrarian roots. The city center consists of low-lying buildings with City Hall standing at two stories, containing the majority of the city governmental offices.





# Framing

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A Deductive Approach

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## SIGNIFICANCE



A slide from an early presentation in our research process.

Christensen, Carleton B. 2007. Popping the Bubble: Ethical Responsibility of Design. [http://www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/dpp\\_journal/paper4a/body.html](http://www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/dpp_journal/paper4a/body.html) (accessed March 11, 2007).

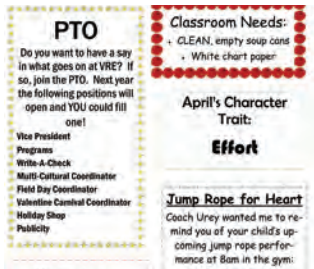
Our research process started with the consideration of a variety of instances, phenomena and societal issues. As a team we were inspired by Carleton B. Christenson's description of a civil society in his article *Popping the Bubble, Ethical Responsibility in Design*, where he stressed that societal issues would best be solved participatively, around pub tables or in coffeehouses versus individuals solving these issues on their own without such collaboration. For this reason we sought out an instance for study which was an example of "community building community."

Our initial research directions involved interests in instances where we could address communal engagement, roles of individuals in societal engagement and the importance of moral and ethical values in the health of communities. These areas of interest lead us to consider the social and cultural perceptions of character. Our team began asking questions like:

*What does it mean to have character?*

*What are the ways that people exhibit positive character traits?*

At this point we became aware of the Owasso Character Initiative, put into place by the City of Owasso in Owasso, Oklahoma. This initiative, a curriculum product centered on supporting character growth in individuals, was designed and produced by the company, Character First of Edmond, Oklahoma and was implemented in Owasso in 2002. The initiative (which had been in effect for over ten years at the time of our study) addresses a moral construct at a community level. Interested in how the program might be affecting community engagement, we identified it as a significant instance worthy of research



Does teaching character, which is common in elementary education, belong at the civic level?

However, after our field observations in Owasso we realized that it would have been very difficult to successfully research the broad topic of character and how it affects community with our limited resources. At this point, the question that began to form was whether or not this initiative was effective. We began to question what good it would be to define character (as the Owasso Character Initiative does) if there was no way to promote and increase awareness of character and positive behaviors. It was at this point that we decided that the efficacy of this initiative would be the focus of our research and we hoped that this research would render findings which could help us to determine whether or not the work of teaching morality through character at a civic level could be generalizable and applied to other communities.

A brief history of the Owasso Character Initiative’s founding and its perceived benefit can be found at the City of Owasso website. While the first paragraph reports of the process that led to the implementation of the program, it also reveals the goal behind the program and in turn, states the focus of our study.

*On May 21, 2002, the Owasso City Council passed a resolution declaring their intent to initiate and support the City of Owasso becoming a “City of Character.” By doing so, Owasso joined local and international communities in a commitment to promoting an environment which emphasizes positive character qualities in every sector of the community.*

When considering the Owasso Character Initiative as a candidate for study, the key words “positive character qualities” piqued our interest because of its function as a program for teaching morality to the citizens of Owasso. For this reason, we set about our study of the Owasso Character Initiative through the lens of the program as a curriculum for moral instruction through presenting a specific “way to be” for those whom it addresses.

**STANCE**  
VIRTUE ETHICS

City of Owasso. Owasso’s Character Initiative. [http://www.cityofowasso.com/character\\_trait/index.html](http://www.cityofowasso.com/character_trait/index.html) (accessed May 4, 2012).



Preliminary research session mapping the formation of the Character Initiative.

**Defining Morality**

In the work of teaching morals and building moral codes into others, we examined several theoretical frameworks:

- » deontology
- » consequentialism
- » pragmatic ethics
- » virtue ethics

Atatman, D. (1997). *Virtue Ethics*.  
Edinburgh University Press.

The key words in Owasso’s campaign, “positive character qualities”, precisely correspond with what virtue ethics claims, which is that “morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual.”

In virtue ethics, the basic judgments in ethics are judgments about character. To further explain it, two basic hypotheses generally could be concluded as: “1. At least some judgments about the value of character traits are independent of judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions; 2. The notion of virtue justifies that of right conduct, that is, the concept of virtue is explanatory prior to that of right conduct” (Atatman, 1997).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	PRIVILEGED METRIC
deontology	actions
consequentialism	consequences resulting from behavior
pragmatic ethics	social context
virtue ethics	individual’s inner character

In short, virtue ethics stands in stark contrast to other theoretical frameworks because it is concerned with an individual’s inner character. . . a “way of being,” as the essential role in their wellbeing.

**VIRTUE ETHICS:**

*Morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual.*

In our interview with City Manager Rodney Ray he indicated that these character attributes are something to which everyone should aspire and not something already attained by policyholders for others to achieve.

When evaluating the Owasso Character Initiative through the lens of virtue ethics, the purpose of the initiative and the problem it is implied to “solve” become more tangible, even if the policy makers we interviewed could only state that “awareness” of the character traits of which the initiative is comprised was the program’s intent. We charge that an underlying and implicit assumption behind the initiative is that Owasso citizens are not moral enough, or more specifically, the current level of the citizens’ moral standards might not be what the city policy makers think they should or could be. Regardless of the accuracy of this charge, our findings in this study have supported the notion that, in order to trigger expectative social change, the City of Owasso implemented their Character Initiative which primarily targets the character traits of its citizens in a way that is consistent with the tenets of virtue ethics.

**A Moral Educational System**

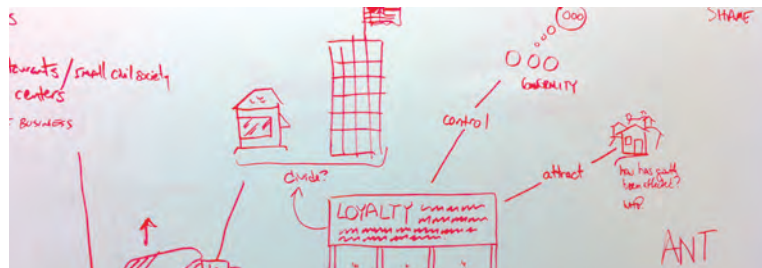
According to virtue ethics, moral education plays a major role in moral motivation, namely, “becoming a good person is not a matter of learning or applying principles, but of imitating some models” (Atatman, 1997).



In a similar vein, "...We learn to be virtuous the same way we learn to dance, to cook, and to play football" (Atatman, 1997). This extends that according to Atatman, there are two ways of learning for individuals in a model of moral education: either by actively learning by following someone else of their own will or in an educational system where learners passively accept the information presented by educators. In the latter sense, rhetorical and persuasive characteristics are often embedded in the educational system.

Considering this model, we posit that the Owasso Character Initiative, its focus on continuously shaping Owasso into a "City of Character," could be identified as a "moral educational system." And much like a school system where educators employ rhetoric to coerce those they educate to embrace their teachings, the Owasso Character Initiative is acting like a curriculum presented to people who engage with it. Through this rhetorical framework we charge that Owasso policy makers, through the Owasso Character Initiative, are attempting to educate and persuade citizens into a "better way of being" with hopes of changing people's behavior. Such changes would thus achieve social change and an "ideal" community of moral citizens could be built by educating those citizens.

Our working definition for rhetoric: any kind of writing or speech presented with the intent to persuade someone.



Determining the level of agency held by character signs.

### The Challenge of Virtues

Furthermore, virtue ethics itself possesses certain difficulties. For instance:

*"...on the idea of flourishing we need first to have an independent account of human flourishing, then we need to show how the virtues are necessary for it, and, finally, the result must more or less coincide with our intuitions about virtues and vices" (Atatman, 1997).*

In other words, while considering complex social contexts, a clear picture of what "good" virtues are and how to achieve them must be delineated in order to measure "growth" or "improvement" of moral character. This work raises several relevant and challenging questions which highlight the complexity of the work of defining virtues. Some of the areas for focus may rest in addressing:

- » Who and how to define virtues.
- » How to reach the identified virtues or operate moral actions.

- » How to infuse the identified virtues to people and let them make moral actions

To this end, the work of defining virtues and then measuring the intensity of how strongly those virtues are held is problematic due to their very nature.

It is for this reason that, though we believe the teaching of morality is at the core of this campaign and in turn, virtue ethics is very much a central stance for our continued research into the decisions that went into its creation and implementation. In the interest of producing a research product which is well-formed and valid in the time frame we had, we chose to focus on the aspect of virtue ethics which examined whether there was an effective connection between “information senders” and “receivers” within the moral education model.

This work then, lead us to the formation of our primary research question for the study:

RESEARCH QUESTION:

*Has the intent of the Owasso Character Campaign been realized in the minds of the citizens?*

# Methods

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Operationalizing Knowledge

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## METHODS

Once we defined a clear question to answer regarding the Owasso Character Initiative, we worked backwards to design a methodology that would best yield the specific answers to that question. We determined the question that would best illustrate whether or not the initiative is working was to discover whether or not the intent of the policy makers was being realized within the community. Our team conducted observations, informal and formal interviews, as well as a short, conversational survey of the citizens of Owasso. The design and research phases were limited to three trips to visit the community between January and April of 2012.

## FIELD RESEARCH

The nature of this project required our team to make several trips to Owasso in an effort to answer our research question most effectively. Field research was spread across several trips, each with a different purpose in an effort to assemble the most complete picture possible.



Assessing a sign placement.



Gathering visual assets for study.



Completed survey documents.

### Field Research Trip One

#### *Observations and Research Question Formation*

FEBRUARY 17–19, 2012

The first trip to Owasso, our research team mapped the placements of the signs throughout the city limits, visited town centers and engaged in casual conversations with members of the community. The purpose of this trip was to perpetuate the scope of our thinking about the concepts of community, character, and the effectiveness of the campaign.

### Field Research Trip Two

#### *Asset Gathering and Charrette Preparation*

MARCH 22–25, 2012

For the second trip to Owasso our research team spent a period of four days gathering photographic evidence and assets for use in our charrette activity as well as for the final case study document. Observations were conducted in public spaces and photographs were taken which both informed our research design, validated our research question and helped us to prepare for our survey activities when we would put the final research plan into action.

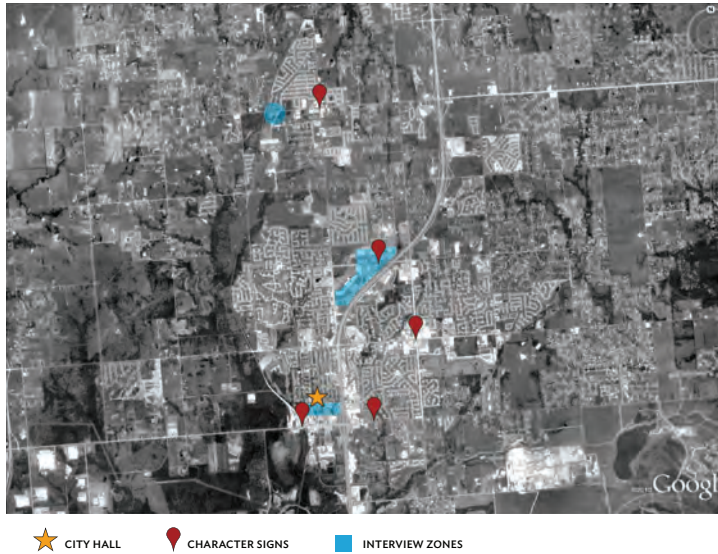
### Trip Three

#### *Field Research, Interviews, Surveys*

APRIL 19–21, 2012

Our third trip to Owasso yielded rich data regarding the intent of the policy makers, including Ms. Michele Dempster, City of Owasso Character Campaign Coordinator, Mr. Rodney Ray, Owasso City Manager and Mr. Warren Lehr, Assistant City Manager.

We then conducted one on one surveys at several areas around Owasso asking citizens a short, three question survey to assess their perception of the campaign. In order to reach the widest demographic sample, we stopped people at shopping centers, parks, in neighborhoods, restaurants and in several other retail outlets and our sampling of these individuals was completely random.



The key instrument for our research when addressing the citizens of Owasso was the survey document. “Are you aware of the Owasso Character Initiative?” “How do you feel about it?” and “Do you live in Owasso and if so, how long?” The answers we received were as short as one to two-words and some others were complete conversations on the initiative itself and the role of character in the community. Our findings can be found in the Analysis portion of this case study.

We also posed an experimental research-based charrette with a small group of five people who became secondary collaborators in the design research process. This charrette created an environment that through a series of activities put the participants into the mind set of pre-selected probable personas of a community with a similar cultural identity to



## LESSONS LEARNED FROM FIELD WORK

Participants were more open to speak with us in one-on-one interviews than when we approached them as a team.

We don't like surveys, so we had a difficult time interrupting people to ask them questions.

Short, concise surveys were more welcomed by participants than long detailed ones.

When we told participants our survey would only take 20 seconds, they were more open to spend the time with us.

Clipboards make people wary. Approaching subjects with nothing in hand was more natural and less off-putting.

Dressing like an ordinary person, without a uniform made it easier to approach people.

When we helped people load their groceries while we talked with them, they seemed to appreciate our help and often extended their answers to questions.

## CHARRETTE

Owasso, Oklahoma. The over arching goal of the charrette was to discover what type of character-promoting campaign would arise from using participatory design with members of the community the campaign was being designed for, rather than having the policy makers decide for everyone. We proposed that those in government and leadership positions may not always hold the values which align with those of citizens within a community.

### **Charrette: Places and People**

*Where do citizens spend their time?*

The initial challenge was to identify places patronized by the specified persona groups. Our secondary collaborators were presented with a mural containing generalized images of places in Owasso—churches, res-



Persona labels used to tag where Owassoans spend their time.

taurants, retail locations, two different types of neighborhoods and recreation areas such as parks and sports venues. The collaborators then placed persona markers on the mural indicating places that specific persona groups would patronize.

### **Charrette: Popular Media**

*What kinds of media appear in these places?*

The next step was for the participants to identify what medium of communication the majority of the community was already engaging with in

the places they patronized most frequently. After a series of short exercises, it was determined that clothing and receipts were the mediums of communication most often engaged with in the mock community.



Participatory design: Charrette participants indicating places in Owasso patronized by specified persona groups.

### **Charrette: Character Words**

*Which words connect with citizens most effectively?*

The third challenge was for our participants to test and then modify the character words and their definitions so they would more clearly communicate to citizens. The current campaign rotates 48 words monthly, meaning that each word and its definition appear to the public once every four years. Our thinking was that if the “community” narrowed the word list to 12 words and definitions that strongly resonated and aligned with the common virtue ethics of the citizens, the more frequent exposure might increase awareness and understanding.



Modifying existing character words and definitions to more accurately reflect the mindset of Owasso citizens.

### **Charrette: Outcome**

*An Informed Product*

Lastly, the group was asked to use one example of the medium and one example of a word to modify the existing campaign further, and design a new communication outlet to reach the members of their community. The exercise resulted in a new communication outlet called “Character Wear”, with the goal of promoting community solidarity through individual expression. Through interaction of the Character Wear website, citizens can choose a character word that resonates most with them and then proceed to customize the front of the shirt with a phrase that defines their idea of the chosen character word.



Charrette participants exploring new communication outlets for the Character Initiative.





# Analysis

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Uncovering Meaning

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**ANALYSIS**

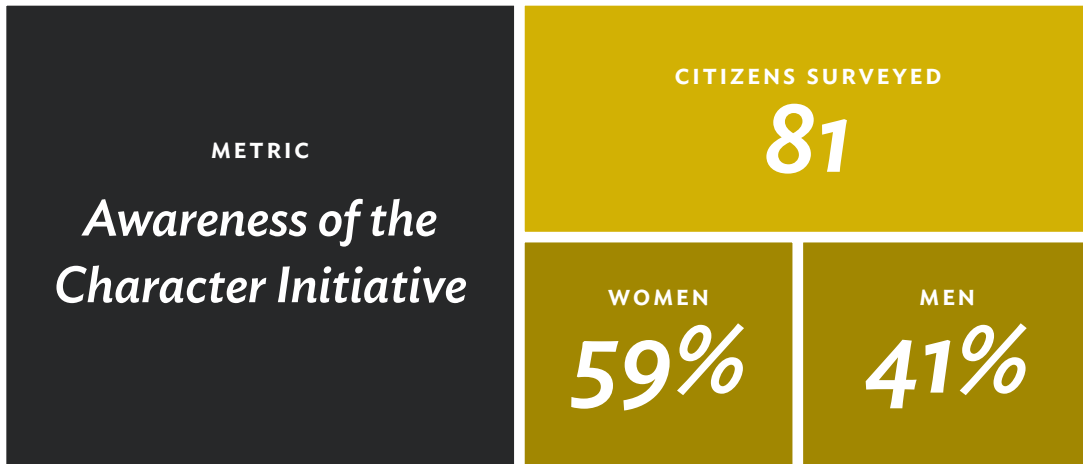
According to the interviews with Owasso policy makers and city planners, the intent of the Owasso Character Initiative over the last 10 years was to create awareness of the character words and the concepts they embody. It is for this reason that the focus of our research and in turn, the shape of the data we collected was geared to test the efficacy of the initiative per the policy makers’ goals. Through our survey instrument and the work of speaking with the citizens of Owasso, we gathered the following data and in turn, present our analysis of those findings.

**Summary of Findings**

Of the 81 people surveyed, 42% offered additional commentary outside of the framework of the three questions that were asked. Citizens living in Owasso for fewer than 10 years had the most to say about the campaign (44.4% of those living in Owasso for more than 10 years, and 44% of those not living in Owasso had additional commentary outside of just answering the survey questions). While conducting our research we were surprised to discover that 31% of the people we surveyed did not live in Owasso but frequent the town regularly for their shopping needs and in turn, value its position as a center of commerce.

**Qualitative Data**

When conducting our survey of citizens, those who gave additional commentary when asked how they felt about the initiative tended to use words and language implying that the signs were meant for others, and how the campaign could serve as a good reminder, or food for thought



for others. No one surveyed discussed how the signs affected him or her personally. Several felt that the signs have gone unnoticed over time; one suggested a change in color or style. One person felt the city spends too much money on the campaign, while another thought they signs looked cheap, and another felt they were “silly” or “cheesy.”

A couple of the citizens living in Owasso for 10+ years felt like the campaign made the city special. Several spoke about the growth in commerce in Owasso, which we can infer that Owasso is doing something different than the surrounding cities in order to manage economic growth.

It is interesting that among those surveyed that did offer additional commentary, several did not know what the campaign was by name (Owasso Character Initiative), and needed further prompting to understand what they were being asked about. Once they were prompted that the campaign was embodied by the implementation of the character signs and the utility bills, these individuals followed by stating how much they liked the initiative. We believe their responses imply that they do not notice the signs, nor are they actively engaging with the initiative, but merely like the *idea* of the campaign.

### Answering Our Question

The research question we were attempting to answer was whether or not the Owasso Character Initiative was effective, based on a metric of whether or not the intent of the policy makers was being realized within the community. Our surveys indicated that 79% of those asked stated that they were indeed aware of the campaign and for this reason, we can say that the campaign has been effective. However, based on the commentary of those surveyed, we can infer that while the citizens are aware, many appear to be concerned with the meaning or effectiveness of the campaign.

### QUOTES: WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE OWASSO CHARACTER INITIATIVE

“The campaign makes Owasso special and a great place to live.”

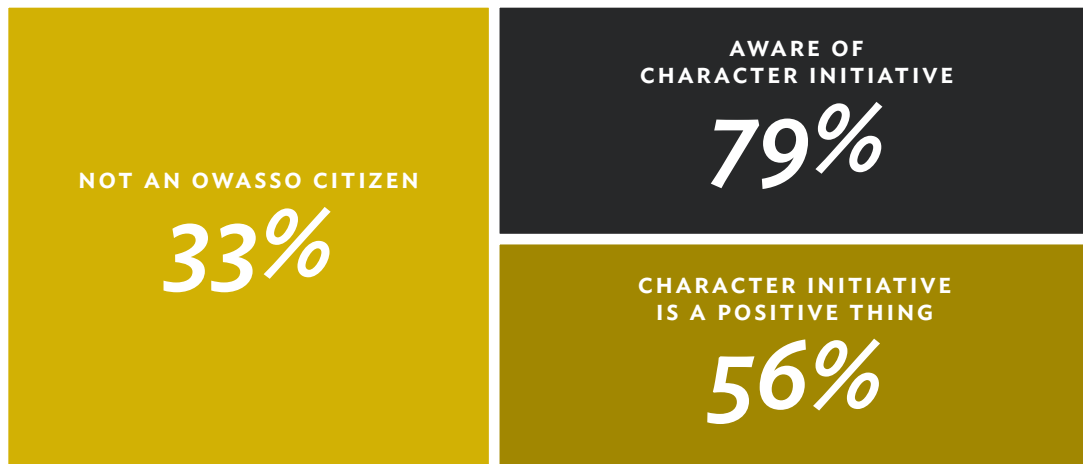
“No sign is going to help someone have character.”

“It would be great if they practice what they preach.”

“I think it is good for people to see.”

“It sets us apart from other cities.”

“I always read them.”



Many individuals who offered commentary indicated that they might believe that the intent of the campaign aligns closer to what our original hypothesis stated: is the City of Owasso rhetorically attempting to offer a specific “way to be.” This intent would match the assumption that being reminded of character and virtue ethics could act as a catalyst to alter

**QUOTES: WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE OWASSO CHARACTER INITIATIVE**

“Good idea but it looks cheap, like a garage sale sign.”

“I thought the bank was responsible for the campaign, not the city.”

“They are great values. People don’t teach values anymore.”

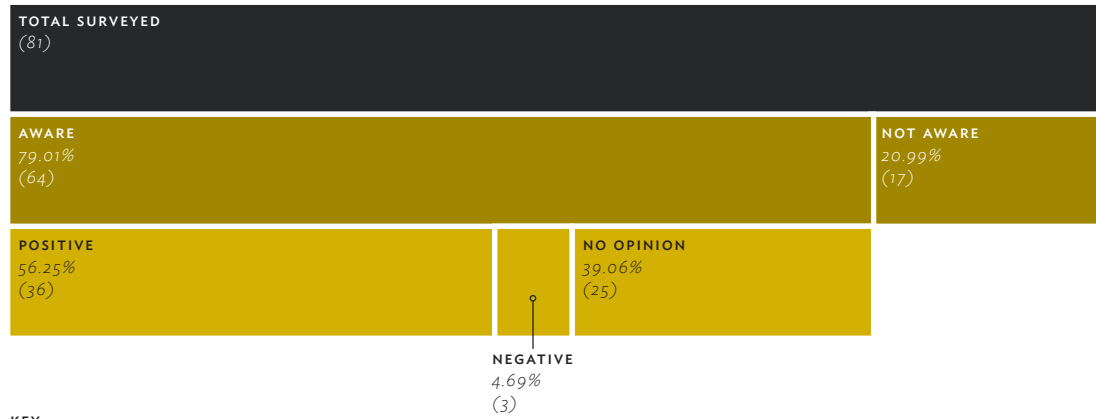
behaviors in the community, to follow the words and definitions being offered by the signs and water bill inserts.

Though when focusing on the work of answering our single research question centered on if citizens are aware of the initiative and of the concept of character, one person shared a comment that directly answered that question. When asked about how she felt about the initiative and then prompted that its intent was to raise awareness for character the woman answered “well... awareness *is* something.” Regardless of if this goal is something we would choose for it, according to this person’s comment and our findings, perhaps the intent of the policy makers is enough to create a change in behavior of those in the community.

## By the Numbers

A visualization of our survey findings.

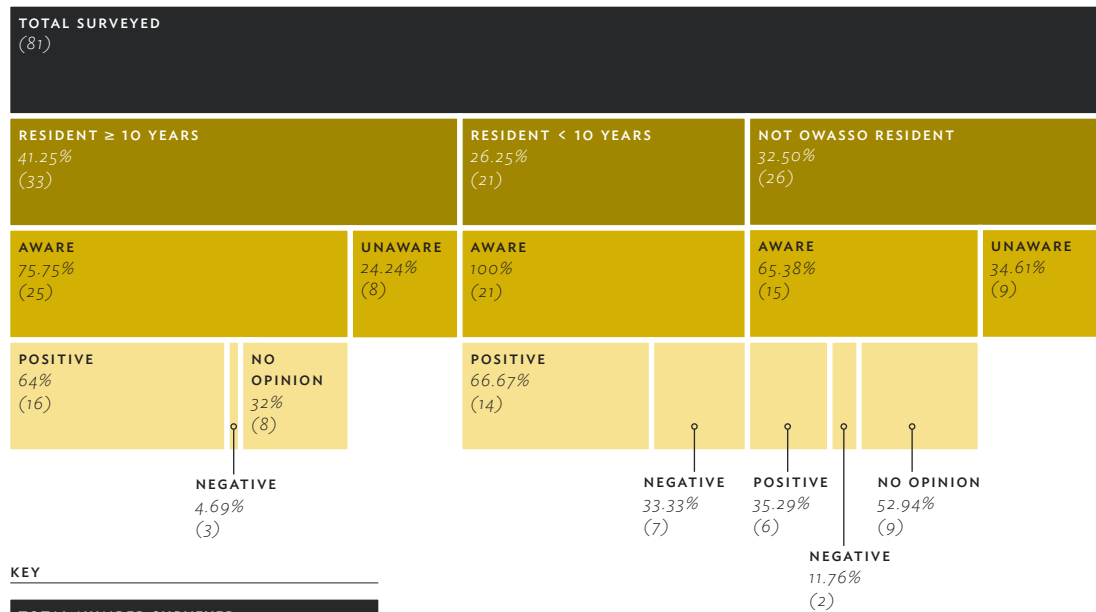
### OVERALL FINDINGS



#### KEY



### DISTRIBUTION OF FINDINGS BASED ON PLACE OF RESIDENCE



#### KEY





# Conclusion and Next Steps

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What We Learned

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## **CONCLUSION**

When initiating our case study, our hypothesis first addressed whether the campaign was [passively] asserting a specific “way to be” onto the citizens of Owasso. In other words, addressing the purpose of this campaign as stated on the city of Owasso’s website— “promoting an environment which emphasizes positive character qualities in every sector of the community”—we were curious whether the Character Initiative was effective or not. With this in mind, the team made three research trips to Owasso in hopes of discovering relevant data or evidence that supported our hypothesis.

Intriguingly, in the interview with the program coordinator, she clearly expressed that the goal of this campaign is simply awareness in the minds of the citizens. As our research has pointed out, the goal mentioned on the city’s website and that expressed by the character coordinator do not align. In fact, the goal of awareness would represent a lower-level goal for the realization of the campaign. Thus, our research endeavors set out to discover any datum that we could gather from our fieldwork to support the goal of awareness, as stated by the program coordinator.

Generally, the data shows that 79% of the citizens surveyed were aware of the Character Initiative. In this sense, the initiative could be identified as successful when based solely on the lower-level goal of awareness. Therefore, we could conclude that the campaign was effective. However, as our data indicates, 66% of the research subjects interviewed disliked or had no opinion of the campaign. When examining the higher-level goal of “positive character qualities in every sector of the community”, which might imply social change, we can infer that the Character Initiative campaign may benefit from a more clearly defined goal in order to achieve a higher level of efficacy. Indeed, though the majority of our informants were aware of the campaign, there is not enough evidence to support the efficacy of the campaign if our definition of the term “effective” states that Owasso citizens would not only be aware of the campaign, but marked behavioral changes could be correlated to the Character Initiative campaign.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Our research has indicated that while 79% of the subjects interviewed were aware of Owasso’s Character Initiative, 66% disliked or had no opinion of it. The city planners, however, have no intention of discontinuing the program in the foreseeable future, leading us to infer that there is a disconnect between the city planners’ intent of the Character Initiative and the citizens’ perceptions of it.

A reassessment of the Character Initiative is necessary in order to determine whether the campaign holds enough value, and possesses goals that align with those of the citizens before continuing with future qualitative



research for incremental improvements to the campaign. Our suggestions for next steps are indicated in the steps below:

*Step 1: The city planners' goal of the Character Initiative—generating awareness of positive character traits—is too vague and would benefit from a clearly defined goal that could yield measurable results.*

*Step 2: Conduct a city-wide poll to determine the value of the Character Initiative and whether or not it resonates with the citizens.*

*Step 3 (Dependent on the results of step 2): By analyzing the current model of the Character initiative, and comparing it to the results yielded from the charrette, we can propose a model for incremental improvement:*

CURRENT MODEL	PROPOSED MODEL	THE METHODOLOGY
Generic model created by Character First and sold to any city that wants to adopt the campaign.	Working collaboratively with citizens, improve the Character Initiative so that is unique to the essence of Owasso and its citizens.	Conduct a city-wide survey to determine which character words resonate most with the citizens.
Character initiative imposed by city leaders without consulting with citizens	Narrow character word choices to include only those that resonate and are most memorable to the citizens.	Conduct behavior analysis through ethnographic observations. to examine the potential effects of the campaign.
Message carried out via outdoor banner signs and utility bill inserts.	Examine where/how citizens move about the city to develop more ways to deploy the initiative through existing mediums for broader exposure.	Determine methods of improving campaign.
48 character-focused words with custom definitions.	Citizens are more likely to respond favorably to the initiative.	Test
Citizens are aware of the initiative, but generally have no opinion of its efficacy.		

