

ABSTRACT

LaTanya Afolayan, ALUMNI GIVING: AN EXAMINATION OF COMMUNICATION AND SOLICITATION PREFERENCES AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN NORTH CAROLINA (Under the direction of Dr. Sandra Seay). Department of Educational Leadership, November 2012.

Unless there are adequate communication and solicitation tools, college and university leaders are unable to maximize sufficient levels of support from alumni. If it is determined that alumni respond differently to various types of communication, college and university administrators can streamline and segment the flow of information more appropriately. This study offered a view of alumni communication and solicitation preferences and explored whether there were differences in preferences based on age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels. This study may offer university presidents, chancellors and advancement professionals with theoretical and practical information to develop and maintain effective communication and solicitation strategies for their alumni.

The Chi-square Test of Independence was utilized to examine whether there were differences in alumni communication and solicitation preferences and the following independent variables – age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels. The Chi-Square Test of Independence revealed an association between alumni solicitation preferences and age. The Chi-square Test of Independence revealed an association between the type of communication preference and age. There was also a significant association related to the preferred frequency of communication and the independent variables of age, gender, and income. The final question in this study was designed to explore whether the receipt of information had an impact on alumni giving decisions. The Chi-square Test of Independence did not reveal a significant association between the receipt of information, giving decisions, and the independent variables – age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels.

ALUMNI GIVING: AN EXAMINATION OF COMMUNICATION AND SOLICITATION
PREFERENCES AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN NORTH CAROLINA

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PREFERENCES AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN NORTH CAROLINA

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DEDICATION

This educational journey is dedicated in memory of my grandparents, Bessie and Bill Carter, my mother, Ann Hayes, and my dear cousin, Andre Agee. Your immeasurable love, guidance, and sacrifice paved the way.

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To the Creator and my amazing family – thank you for your encouragement and support of one of my most important educational and professional endeavors.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Leaders and administrators in public and private institutions of higher education are placing greater emphasis on private giving as a resource for budgetary needs. With greater demands on state budgets for health care, prisons, and transportation, higher education is competing for funding and seeking an ever-increasing amount of alumni-generated donations to make up the difference (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). State appropriations to higher education continue to dwindle, forcing public college and university administrators across the country to seek increasing levels of support from their alumni. Scholarly interest in alumni giving to colleges and universities continues to grow. The importance of understanding alumni giving patterns should not be underestimated. Alumni constitute the largest and most reliable source of support for colleges and universities. The ability of institutional leaders to effectively communicate their vision and hence, successfully sell their vision to the alumni and students is critical to establishing a platform upon which greater levels of alumni giving can become possible (Pumerantz, 2005).

Weerts and Ronca (2007) described the alumni donor as one who experienced high levels of engagement as a student. Earlier researchers noted that alumni giving was associated with mentoring in college (Clotfelter, 2003), a favorable faculty/student ratio, a strong academic reputation (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002), frequent contact with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003), and overall graduation rates (Gunsalus, 2004). In general, there was a strong connection between giving and how alumni viewed their alma mater, the degree of satisfaction with their alumni experience, and their level of engagement in alumni activities (Caboni, 2003; Clotfelter, 2003; Loessin, Duronio, & Borton, 1986; Miracle, 1977; Monks, 2003). Alumni with fewer

financial burdens associated with their undergraduate education were more likely to give and volunteer. In their model of expected relationships, Weerts and Ronca (2007) predicted that female alumni were the most likely donors. Life stage was also an important factor in predicting alumni support. Alumni giving was positively correlated with age; alumni donors and volunteers were typically middle-aged. Married alumni gave with more frequency than single alumni. James (2008) characterized the educational donor as someone who was married with children. Unlike donors in other categories, most educational donors had graduate degrees. Employment status was another critical variable – employed alumni were 1.8 times more likely to give compared to those who did not support their alma mater. Weerts and Ronca (2007) also discovered that employed alumni gave and volunteered at 12.71 times more than other graduates.

Alumni donors have also been distinguished by their attitudes and expectations of the university regarding their personal responsibility to give and volunteer. An important question for institutional leaders to consider is “how are these alumni attitudes formed? Are these values cultivated at the institutions or elsewhere? “Supporter” alumni were described as individuals who initiated life-long relationships with the university by attending campus events after graduation. Alumni donors and volunteers maintained deeper connections with their alma mater and consequently, were more informed regarding the needs of the institution and their role in meeting those needs.

Charitable contributions to colleges and universities in the United States increased 8.2 % in 2011, reaching \$30.30 billion, according to results of the annual Voluntary Support of Education (VSE) Survey (Council for Aid to Education [CAE], 2012). Adjusted for inflation, overall giving to higher education increased 4.8%. In 2011, alumni giving increased by 9.9% from 25.4% in 2010 (\$7.1 billion) to 25.7% (\$7.8 billion) in 2011.

Giving to higher education in 2011 from other categories included non-alumni, 18.6% (\$5.65 billion); corporations, 16.6% (\$5.02 billion); foundations, 28.6% (\$8.68 billion); religious organizations, 1% (\$.31 billion); and other organizations, 9% (\$2.85 billion).

These results indicated a slight shift in giving to colleges and universities. In 2010, there was a .4% decrease in alumni contributions compared to alumni giving in 2009 (CAE, 2011). The national alumni participation rate also declined in 2010 to 9.8% compared to 10% in 2009. In 2010, the average gift per contributing alumnus was lower than gifts in 2006. Alumni participation has declined annually for many years, even when the economy was stronger. While the economy has affected alumni giving in recent years education experts point to a number of non-economic reasons.

Contributions from donor-advised funds and family foundations, which do not count as alumni gifts, have become much more popular. Furthermore, colleges and universities are facing more challenges from other popular charitable causes (Retrieved from <http://educationportal.com/articles>, Education Insider News Blog, 2010). A 2010 survey distributed by the Engagement Strategies Group (ESG) pointed to weak alumni relationships as another possible cause for the decline in alumni participation. Young alumni felt that colleges did not need their money, and older alumni felt disconnected from their alma mater (Retrieved from <http://engagementstrategiesgroup.com/news.php>).

While it was argued that altruism was a major motive for charitable contributions to one's alma mater, Mann (2007), Weerts and Ronca (2007), and Hoyt (2005) agreed that altruistic values and reciprocity motivated alumni to support their alma maters. A graduates' perception of service value, service quality and satisfaction with the institution was another factor that impacted alumni giving. The *Social Exchange Theory* was associated with the graduates'

perception regarding the current value of the institution or the graduates' past experiences with the institution. Similarly, Rosbult (1980) introduced the *investment model* – an individual's commitment to a relationship was a function of the outcomes (rewards and costs), and the perceived magnitude of the relationship, along with a comparison of the quality of the best alternative to the relationship (Weerts & Ronca, 2007).

Some alumni donors needed to know that the gifts to their alma maters would benefit the recipients and make a difference. This perspective was linked to Mann's (2007) *economic theory* which was consistent with Hoyt's (2005) finding that alumni gave out of a sense of perceived need and efficacy. Other alumni gave because of their perceived association with the institution. This giving behavior was described by Mann (2007) as the *organizational identity theory*, while alumni giving behavior based on an individual's connection to a group was characterized by *the social identification theory*.

Historically, fundraising practitioners at colleges and universities have utilized direct mail, face-to-face visits, correspondence, and phone contact as the basis for maintaining contact with donors. The polling firm International Communications Research (ICR) recently surveyed 1,100 college graduates and post-graduate school respondents regarding their preferences for receiving information from their alma maters. About 57% of the respondents indicated a preference for receiving correspondence, news and other communications by mail compared to 31% who preferred e-mail; only 3% of the respondents selected social networking sites. These alumni also indicated a strong preference for regular mail (54%) versus e-mail (23%) as the preferred communication channel when they were contacted regarding gifts and donations from their college or university.

About 5% of these graduates chose phone contact as the preferred channel while 1% chose social networking sites (Retrieved from <http://whattheythink.com/news/40209>). In a 2010 study conducted by the Convio, Edge Research, and the Sea Change Strategies Group, researchers confirmed that direct mail was the best channel for soliciting and collecting gifts. The Convio, Edge Research, and the Sea Change Strategies Group (2010) group challenged development personnel to build and regularly review integrated campaign calendars that encompassed varied communication and solicitation strategies across multiple channels. Alumni fundraisers and higher education administrators might increase alumni solicitations if they collaboratively created a comprehensive communications strategy, enhanced alumni services based on stakeholder needs, and most importantly, redirected and expanded efforts to connect with older female alumni (Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007).

It may not be effective for presidents, chancellors and development officers to solicit all alumni in the same manner. The segmentation of alumni communication and solicitation strategies may help to identify those alumni who are more likely to support their alma mater. For example, the Convio, Edge Research, and the Sea Change Strategies Group (2010) study focused on the charitable giving habits and solicitation preferences of individuals segmented into four groups: Matures (born before 1946), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), and Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1991). Direct mail was the dominant giving channel for Matures (77%). Baby Boomers also preferred direct mail (54%). Meanwhile, Generation X donors preferred check-out donations as their primary giving method; Generation Y donors selected online giving as their preferred method.

The emergence of new communication tools through the World Wide Web has paved the way for the utilization of a variety of communication channels. This new technology provides

university fundraisers and administrators with a viable means of communicating with alumni and soliciting them more frequently. The notion of Integrated Marketing Communications designed to engage donors through multiple channels was the focus of a study conducted by Convio and Strategic One (2007). These researchers concluded that donor engagement through multiple communication channels had greater long term value compared to single channel communication.

Earlier, Kent and Taylor (1998) advocated for an exploration of the use and utility of the Internet to build organizational-public relationships. They argued that the interaction between an organization and its publics was vital for improving and maintaining relationships. Their *dialogic communication* model emphasized the importance of creating and sustaining relationships with constituents online. The premise of dialogic communication theory was to create lasting, genuine, and valuable relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Frequent communication to alumni has been identified as an important factor in enhancing alumni relationships. Levine (2008) confirmed the correlation between the frequency in communication and an increase in alumni giving and participation rates.

Statement of the Problem

Philanthropy research has been a part of the traditional disciplines of economics, psychology, and sociology, however, it has not been an accepted part of higher education research for very long (Drezner, 2011). Despite the vast amount of research regarding alumni donor motivation (see Table 1), Hoyt (2005) advocated for additional data regarding specific solicitation methods to improve and increase alumni giving. He also supported the examination

Table 1

Alumni Donor Motivation Theories

	Altruism	Social Exchange	Economic	Organizational identity	Social identity
Mann (2007)	X	X	X	X	X
Weerts & Ronca (2007)	X	X	X		
Hoyt (2005)	X	X	X		
Sun et al. (2007)				X	
O'Neill (2005)					X

Note. Altruism - Alumni give for the benefit of others. Social exchange – Alumni give in expectation of reciprocation, or they are influenced by modeling, social pressures, reinforcement, and the desire for status (Hatfield, Walster, & Piliavin, 1978; Rosenham, 1978; Wilmoth, 1990). Economic – Alumni give out of a sense of perceived need and efficacy. Institutions must demonstrate the need for the gift and how it will be utilized (Hoyt, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Organizational Identification Theory – Alumni give based on their perceived association with the institution (Mann, 2007; Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007). Social Identity Theory – Alumni give based on their psychological connection to a group, individual or team (Mann, 2007; O'Neill, 2005).

of alumni solicitation strategies in future research in order to improve alumni solicitations, (Hoyt, 2005).

A common approach in national studies of household charitable giving is to treat *all* charitable giving as a single category. James (2008) argued that these studies have not examined the extent that certain characteristics were more or less effective in predicting educational giving compared with other forms of giving. Research institutes such as the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy at IUPUI and companies including Convio and Blackbaud have started to closely examine alumni giving patterns. However, there is still scant research dedicated to alumni solicitation preferences and alumni perspectives regarding the frequency of communication from their alma maters. There is also growing interest in the potential of the Internet as the new communication and solicitation tool. Researchers pointed out that direct mail and online donors are two different sectors, inhabiting two different universes (Clolery, 2008). Previous research has been generally related to non-profits and does not specifically pertain to the communication and solicitation preferences of alumni donors. Therefore, specific research related to alumni communication and solicitation preferences may be beneficial to college and university administrators and advancement professionals. The identification of alumni communication and solicitation preferences may enhance alumni engagement and positively impact alumni giving.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify alumni communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between several independent variables (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels) and to provide recommendations for future use. The researcher examined differences in alumni preferences specifically related to two

methods of solicitation – direct mail and online (e-mail), and also, differences in alumni preferences specifically related to two methods of communication – direct mail and online (e-mail).

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to provide empirical data regarding alumni communication and solicitation preferences. An expected outcome was the compilation of data to strengthen advancement strategies for development professionals, university chancellors and presidents, who all face the challenges of improving alumni giving and participation rates. The need for private resources in higher education will continue to escalate, therefore, a comprehensive understanding the factors that stimulate engagement and giving from alumni and others is vital.

In academic settings, broad alumni participation helps establish a culture of philanthropy that is vital to the success and sustainability of the institution. According Grezenbacher and Associates (2010), there is strength in numbers. Alumni participation is often viewed as a barometer of alumni satisfaction. Furthermore, the funds donated by alumni have a significant impact on an institution's ability to leverage other funds.

Research Questions

This focus of this research was an examination of alumni communication and solicitation preferences by exploring the following questions:

1. What is the difference in the preferred solicitation method among alumni – direct mail or online?
2. What is the difference in the preferred communication method among alumni – direct mail or online?
3. What is the difference in the preferred communication frequency among alumni?

4. Is there a difference in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving decisions?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a difference in alumni solicitation preferences (direct mail and online) based upon age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels.
2. There is a difference in alumni communication preferences (direct mail and online) based upon age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels.
3. There is a difference in the preferred communication frequency of alumni based upon age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels.
4. There is a difference in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving decisions based upon age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels.

Population of the Study

The alumni selected for this study were graduates of a public university in North Carolina. Appalachian State University is one of sixteen constituent universities in the University of North Carolina System. The administrative head of the University of North Carolina is the president elected by the Board of Governors. Each institution is headed by a chancellor who reports to the president of the University of North Carolina. Established in 1899 as Watauga Academy, Appalachian State University has evolved into a pre-eminent university located in a unique, rural mountain environment.

Appalachian State University enrolls approximately 17,000 students and offers more than 140 undergraduate and graduate degrees, including a doctoral degree in higher education (Retrieved from www.appstate.edu). Appalachian State University is classified as a

“master’s/large” degree granting institution. This classification includes institutions that have awarded at least 50 master’s degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees during the update year (Retrieved from www.classifications.carnegiefoundation.org).

This university’s 100,000 alumni represented a broad group of individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds with careers in several professions including education, law, business, medicine, allied health, the arts, industrial technology, design and construction, and the environmental sciences. Appalachian State University alumni donors were selected to participate in this study. An alumni donor was defined an individual with a valid e-mail address who made one or more contributions to the university within a 10 year period between 2001 through 2011.

Methodology

This was a quantitative study. The researcher developed and distributed a survey to a representative sample of alumni donors with valid e-mail addresses. The alumni who made contributions to the university between 2001 and 2011 were included in this study. A query to identify these alumni was generated by the staff in the Office of Advancement Services. After the approval of the Institutional Review Board, the survey distribution and data compilation period began in May 2012 and ended in May 2012. Frequency counts were used to determine alumni preferences by demographic variables. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was utilized to determine whether there were significant differences among the preferences by demographics. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19 software.

Definition of Terms

Alumni - graduates of an institution of higher education. In the current study, alumni are individuals who received a degree from the institution.

Alumni participation - the percentage of alumni who make a contribution to an institution of higher education during a specified time period.

Carnegie Classification - created by a nonprofit organization that classifies institutions of higher education to create a measurement of comparison among institutions.

Development - the department that is responsible for raising funds for an institution. In colleges and universities, this department is typically a unit of the Office of Institutional Advancement, University Advancement or External Relations.

Direct mail solicitation – in the current study this is a request for a contribution to an alumna or an alumnus that is sent through the United States Postal Service.

Donor – in the current study this is an individual who gives a financial contribution to an institution of higher education.

Integrated Marketing Communications – refers to a multi-faceted approach to message reinforcement through advertising, marketing, promotions, direct mail, e-mail, phone contact, and face-to-face interaction. Integrated Marketing Communications involves continuous engagement to maximize communication and efficiently utilize institutional resources.

Online solicitation – in the current study this is a request for a contribution that is included in an e-mail message to an alumna or alumnus.

Philanthropy – an action that serves to improve mankind with no motive of profit. Philanthropy involves a sacrifice of time and/or resources devoted to improve the quality of life of others.

Social media communication – web and mobile- based communication designed to promote continuous engagement. Some examples of social media tools include Internet publications (magazines, newsletters), websites, blogs, e-mail, instant messaging, personal

landing pages (PURL), and social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Twitter.

Limitations

1. The study was limited to one group of alumni from a public university in North Carolina. The responses from this study may not be representative of alumni from other colleges and universities.
2. The participants self-identified in the following categories: age, gender, ethnicity, income, marital status, educational and income levels.
3. The participants in the study were alumni who were identified as donors. For the purpose of this study, alumni donors were individuals who made one or more contributions to the university between 2001 and 2011.
4. The participants in the study were only alumni donors with valid e-mail addresses.
5. Direct mail (U.S. Mail) and online (e-mail) were the primary communication and solicitation methods examined in this study.

Organization of the Study

The study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the problem, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the hypotheses, purpose of the study, a description of the study population, the methodology, limitations, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of related literature. Chapter 3 describes the procedures used to obtain and analyze the data. Chapter 4 includes the results of the study, the statistical techniques utilized for the study, and the findings. Chapter 5 includes the practical and theoretical implications, recommendations for additional research, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study was devoted to an examination of the differences in alumni preferences related to communication and solicitations – direct mail versus online. This review of the literature begins with a description of the current climate of philanthropy in higher education. Section Two introduces alumni donor characteristics, demographics, donor motivation theory, donor behavior, and giving to higher education. Section Three highlights the findings related to direct mail and online communication and solicitation preferences. Section Four provides an introduction to some of the emerging strategies being utilized to improve communication, engagement, and giving. The final part of Section Four includes a discussion regarding generational giving channels, demographics in online giving, integrated marketing communications, and social media communication.

Today, private fundraising at colleges and universities is a top priority. It is clear that an institution's ability to realize innovative but costly strategic goals is directly dependent on donations from alumni, foundations, corporations, friends, parents, and other institutional partners. The reliance on fund-raising dollars is even more pronounced due to the rising public scrutiny of the cost of higher education (Farrell, 2003; Trompley, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2006). With the trend of declining financial support from state and federal governments, chancellors and presidents realize that they must develop supplemental revenue streams to maintain institutional survival and growth. In the future, public institutions of higher education will be compelled to expand the sources for external support in order to meet escalating budgetary needs.

Understanding the motivations and types of affinity that the alumni have to some groups or academic areas is a critical component to attracting support from alumni (Pumerantz, 2005). An improved understanding of the most important donor groups and their relationships with educational institutions is of high utility to educational leaders and decision makers (Leslie & Ramey, 1988). Thus, the development of specific strategies designed to influence segments of the alumni who are most likely to support or contribute is an appropriate dimension of successful fund-raising in higher education (Grill, 1988).

Alumni Donors

The typical alumni donor is defined as someone who experienced high levels of engagement as a student (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Earlier, researchers suggested that alumni giving was associated with mentoring in college (Clotfelter, 2003), a favorable faculty-student ratio, a strong academic reputation (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002), frequent contact with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003), and overall graduation rates (Gunsalus, 2004). In general, there was a strong connection between giving and how alumni viewed their alma maters, the degree of satisfaction with their alumni experience, and their level of engagement in alumni activities (Caboni, 2003; Clotfelter, 2003; Loessin et al., 1986; Miracle, 1977; Monks, 2003). Alumni with fewer financial burdens associated with their undergraduate education were more likely to give and volunteer.

In their model of expected relationships, Weerts and Ronca (2007) predicted that female alumni were more likely to give and volunteer than men. Life stage was also an important factor in predicting alumni support.

Alumni giving has been positively correlated with age; alumni donors and volunteers are typically middle-aged. Earlier, Baade and Sunberg (1993) also determined the importance of

compiling alumni age-profile data in order to target individuals who were most likely to give. Their research supported the notion that people saved more and had more available to give as they aged (according to what are termed as “life-cycle effects”); colleges could benefit financially from an aging America (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1993).

For studies specific to educational giving, research was restricted to studies of the experiences of particular educational institutions or groups of institutions. While charitable giving was positively associated with greater levels of income (James & Sharpe, 2007), wealth (Andreoni & Scholz, 1998), and education (Brown & Lankford, 1992; Feldstein & Clotfelter, 1976; Kingma, 1989), James (2008) completed an educational giving study that utilized nationally representative data. He characterized the educational donor as an individual who was married with children. More than three times as many educational donors had graduate degrees compared to donors in other categories. James (2008) also concluded that educational donors had dramatically higher markers of socio-economic status in comparison to other donors. Typically, educational donors had over 50% more income and over 2 ½ times more liquid wealth than other donors. Furthermore, there was a connection between giving to education and religious giving was seen not only in average giving levels but also in the frequency of giving.

Two-thirds of educational donors (66.1%) in the James (2008) study also supported religious organizations. Therefore, he concluded that educational donors are not “silo” donors; they have a tendency to respond to solicitations from a variety of non-profit organizations. The donor’s educational level was identified as the highest predictor of educational giving in his research study. Therefore, he recommended the utilization of prospect identification strategies which segmented donors based on their educational levels.

Employment status was another critical variable in determining which alumni gave – employed alumni were 1.8 times more likely to give compared to those who did not support their alma mater (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Employed alumni gave and volunteered 12.71 times more than unemployed graduates.

Alumni donors were also distinguished by their attitudes and expectations of the university and perceptions regarding their personal responsibility to give and volunteer. Furthermore, alumni generosity was impacted by national rankings that highlighted institutional characteristics such as the caliber of the faculty and students, library holdings, and financial resources.

Briechele (2003) studied the giving habits of alumnae at public and private universities. A feeling of obligation was the primary determinant of alumnae giving. This sense of obligation was often linked to wanting to “pay forward” any financial assistance that the women received as students. Briechele’s findings coincided with the results of a study by Dugan, Mullin and Siegfried (2000) whose research focused on young alumni at Vanderbilt University – these alumni were 12% more likely to give if they had received need-based grants as students. In contrast, the probability of giving decreased if alumni received need based loans.

The positive correlation between a student’s campus experiences and giving as an alumna or alumnus was verified by Monks (2003). Former students who had internships, contact with faculty outside class, and positive relationships with their advisors were more likely to become donors as alumni. Clotfelter (2003) explored a set of data consisting of individual survey responses from two alumni cohorts of 14 highly selective private colleges and universities. The regression equations explaining alumni giving showed the importance of two factors – income and an overall good opinion of one’s alma mater.

Sun, Hoffman and Grady (2007) utilized discriminant analysis to identify the important predictors of alumni giving. Not only were demographic variables such as graduation year and gender significant, but other factors such as student experience and student-faculty relationships were also important. If alumni were satisfied with their experiences as students, they more inclined to give. Graduation year emerged as the most significant predictor of alumni donations. Age was identified as a prominent indicator of alumni giving. Generally, older alumni had a higher net worth and a larger capacity for charitable giving.

Sun et al. (2007) supported the utilization of an alumni-giving decision model to target the most likely alumni donors based on the following factors:

1. Student experience – students who were treated favorably were more likely to contribute as alumni;
2. Alumni experience – the perceptions that alumni had regarding their alma mater was heavily dependent on the marketing efforts of the alumni association. Sun et al.'s (2007) findings supported Shadoian's (1989) study which revealed several variables related to the alumni donation model. These variables included the number of post-graduate campus visits, the frequency in receiving and reading alumni publications, and contact with faculty members – these were significant predictors of future donation (Sun et al., 2007);
3. Alumni motivation – referred to the internal state or desire that alumni possessed which was rooted in one's awareness to induce a desire to give to the alma mater. Sun et al.'s (2007) finding supported Miracle's (1977) research – alumni who understood the financial needs of the alma mater were more motivated to give than those without similar perceptions (Sun et al., 2007 p. 313);

4. Demographic variables – the number of years between graduation and the onset of giving had a substantial impact on giving. The researchers agreed that alumni participation in giving rose with the increase in class age. Earlier, Graham and Husted (1993) demonstrated that there was also a high correlation between alumni wealth and donations to their alma mater. (Sun et al., 2007, p. 309).

Since these researchers determined that graduation year was the most significant predictor of alumni donations, this signaled the need to increase cultivation activities with older alumni (Sun et al., 2007). Gender was identified as another important predictor variable. Women donated more often than men. Sun et al. (2007, p. 330) identified older women as the largest potential source for significant giving for two reasons - women live longer than men and inherit 70% of all estates. They were expected to own half of the wealth in the US by 2010 (Strout, 2007). One example of the impact of women donors was the increase in female donors at Iowa State University, where the number of female donors grew by 37%. Overall, the amount of money donated at Iowa State increased by 138% (Strout, 2007, p. 330). Table 2 illustrates a consistent pattern of alumni donor demographics.

Earlier, Okunade, Wunnava and Walsh (1994) examined the age donation profile of alumni donors at a large public institution based on a pooled micro-data random sample of 4,242 alumni who gave cash gifts during the 1975/76-1989/90 fiscal years. Their goal was to support the projection of alumni donations through the analysis of alumni demographics. The effects on giving were analyzed based on the donor's gender, college major, and graduation status – (with or without honors), graduate education (and where obtained), involvement in campus Greek

Table 2

Alumni Donor Demographics

	Age	Gender	Income	Student Experience	Post-graduate Involvement
Weerts & Ronca (2007)	Middle-aged	Female		High levels of engagement as a student	
Clotfelter (2003)			A high level of income	Mentored by faculty	Positive perception of alma mater, good alumni experiences, and level of engagement in alumni activities
Monks (2003)				Favorable student experience, internships; Frequent contact with faculty and staff; relationship with advisor	Perception of alma mater, good alumni experience, and level of engagement in alumni activities
Pumerantz (2005)				Favorable student experiences and an environment that fosters a culture of philanthropy for students	
Sun et al., (2007)	Giving increased with increase in years out of college	Women give more often than men		Favorable student experience; favorable relationship with faculty.	Frequency of visits to campus after graduation, receipt of alumni publications; receives information regarding schools' financial needs

clubs and other non-Greek organizations. Sample data covered 303 randomly selected undergraduate alumni who graduated between 1926/1927 and 1989/90. Gender did not influence alumni giving, however, the outcome of the study suggested that men had higher age-earning profiles than females. Men also had a higher likelihood of giving cash gifts in exchange for personal rewards. The growth rates of gifts to the university selected for the study were projected to remain positive for an alumna or alumnus for approximately 22.5 years from the time of graduation. The researchers also concluded that the charitable giving of alumni was cyclical and highly sensitive to the business cycle.

Okunade et al. (1994) determined that among the participants in this study, the growth rate of alumni charitable gifts remained positive until about age 52; however, this alumni age giving profile was not completely consistent with giving to other non-profits in terms of the donor's income and marginal tax rate. The growth rate of alumni gifts was expected to level off and decline before the usual retirement age of 65. The shorter giving time span in this study may have been in response to the need for alumni to build their retirement investments before reaching the traditional retirement age of 65.

Why Alumni Give: Theoretical Perspectives

General models of altruism and helping behavior have been applied to alumni research from several disciplines to explain the motivation for alumni giving. Economists view altruism as a "strategic selfish activity" in which donors derive utility from the act of contributing. Sociological theories posited that people give in expectation of reciprocation or, they were influenced by modeling, social pressures, reinforcement, and the desire for status (Hatfield, Walster, & Piliavin, 1978; Rosenhan, 1978; Wilmoth, 1990).

While these perspectives were useful, Hoyt (2005) argued that they failed to fully account for the relevant factors that affected alumni giving in a higher education. Strickland (2007) observed that today's education donors appeared interested in how institutions build communities and how their giving represents an opportunity for affecting change and making a transformative impact on the institution's role in society.

She emphasized that the connection between the motives of today's education donors and the outlets for their giving indicates an opportunity for affecting change in an institution's internal operations and in making a transformative impact on the institution's role in society (Strickland, 2007). Hodge (2003) concurred and described a new paradigm for the educational donor's relationship with the institution which has moved from a *transactional stage* (giving in exchange for a personal benefit) to a *transformational stage* (where the donor and the organization are partners). Transformational donors give in order to positively change the organization (Grace & Wendroff, 2001). Another critical difference between *transactive philanthropy* and *investment philanthropy* was accountability which was always desired but is now of primary importance (Wagner, 2003).

Donors who support higher education represent a change in demographics from earlier educational philanthropists (Grace & Wendroff, 2001). "Today's higher education donors include cyber and venture-capital rich women, ethnic and racial groups previously underrepresented or under-recognized in philanthropy; those who have become wealthy through the intergenerational transfer of trillions of dollars " (Grace & Wendroff, 2001, p. 86).

With more complex and sophisticated competition, college and universities must focus on determining the most effective ways to connect with their alumni base in order to create lifelong partnerships (Mann, 2007). An understanding of the factors that motivate alumni giving

from a theoretical context is also of great utility to university presidents, chancellors and advancement professionals. Connecting fund-raising strategy to a theoretical base is easily overlooked as senior leadership teams experience frequent turnover and quickly narrow their focus on campaign goals, fund-raising targets or major prospects. One of the theoretical perspectives for alumni giving is altruism. Mann (2007), Weerts and Ronca, (2007) and Hoyt (2005) concluded that altruistic values and reciprocity were the major factors that motivated alumni to financially support their alma maters. Mann (2007) emphasized that alumni donor motivation cannot be viewed in the context of a single field or discipline (see Table 1). He identified several theoretical perspectives that were critical to understanding philanthropy and how they were woven into the fabric of several disciplines.

Services-Philanthropic Giving – In some instances, giving was influenced by the graduates' perception of service value, service quality, and satisfaction with the institution (Mann, 2007). Service value was defined as the trade-off that consumers made between what they received and what they gave up to acquire those benefits (Gale, 1992; Monroe, 1990).

Weerts and Ronca (2007) referred to this as the *social exchange theory* – alumni support was associated with the graduates' perception regarding the current value of the institution or the graduate's past experiences with the institution. Similarly, Rosbult (1980) introduced the *investment perspective* – “an individual's commitment to a relationship was a function of outcomes (rewards and costs), and the perceived magnitude of the relationship, along with a comparison of the quality of the best alternative to the relationship” (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Cook (1994) discovered that a belief in the schools' mission, its organizational prestige, and in a certain area (school, department, extracurricular activity) were also primary donor motives for alumni giving.

An economic perspective – Some alumni donors needed to know that gifts to their alma mater would benefit the recipients and make a difference. This perspective was linked to Mann's (2007) *economic theory* which was consistent with Hoyt's (2005) findings that alumni gave out of a sense of perceived need and efficacy. The likelihood of repeat gifts was higher if the institution demonstrated the need for a gift and how it would be utilized. Weerts and Ronca (2007) defined this motivation for alumni giving as the *expectancy theory* which emerged as the most powerful inclination for giving in their analyses of volunteers, donors, and supportive alumni. These researchers concluded that there was a higher likelihood of giving and volunteering if alumni felt that their involvement had a positive impact on the institution.

Organizational Identification Theory – Some alumni giving was based on the graduates' perceived association with the institution. Mann (2007) described this as the *organizational identification theory* which correlated giving to the graduates' strong connection to the institution. Organizational identification was defined as a perception that one belongs to an organization and shared the success and failure of the organization (Sun et al., 2007).

Social Identification Theory – Alumni who maintained a positive psychological connection to their alma mater based on their perceived connection to a group, individual, or team made giving decisions based on their *social identification*. Colleges and universities that directed fundraising solicitations toward groups or teams may be able to motivate alumni to give based on their social order within a group or organization. The social identity theory was based on the premise that individuals who participated in specific activities aligned their social identities with support for the institutions (Sun et al., 2007). For example, in 2008, O'Neill studied the impact of undergraduate Greek membership on alumni giving. Her statistical analyses confirmed a positive correlation between Greek membership and alumni giving. This

study also revealed the differences in the giving patterns of Greek alumni compared to non-Greek alumni. A significant number of Greek alumni donors gave at higher levels and gave more consistently over time in comparison to their non-Greek peers (O'Neill, 2005).

Minnear (2006) utilized three scales from previous research to measure alumni incentives, alumni involvement, and student involvement were the factors that motivated alumni to make contributions to their alma maters. Two findings emerged from her study. First, being asked to give and being involved with the institution were strong predictors of alumni giving. Secondly, the availability of financial resources to give was statistically significant in predicting the amount donated.

Donor Motivation Theory

Roderick Williams (2007) studied the differences in donor motivation by age between Mature Donors (59 and older), Baby Boomers (40-58), and Young Adult Donors (ages 18-39). Giving behavior was measured against three factors of significance to donors – organizational efficiency, information sharing, and program outcomes. Young Adult Donors placed the highest value on information sharing from the non-profit in comparison to Mature Donors and Baby Boomers. The majority of the Young Adult Donors (67%) also confirmed that they were most likely to give to a charity when they had specific information regarding the use of their contributions (Roderick Williams, 2007). Since the manner in which gifts were used was of more importance to this group, the researcher suggested an increase in the amount and frequency of information that Young Adult Donors received.

Baby Boomers placed greater value on organizational efficiency and quantifiable results (Roderick Williams, 2007). This group also possessed a strong desire to make things happen with their money. Baby Boomers viewed their contributions as investments and thus, demanded

some measurable return on their support. Young Adult Donors were more likely than Baby Boomers and Mature Donors to value program outcomes when making the decision to give. Among the three groups, Mature Donors placed the greatest value on organizational efficiency.

While James (2008) advocated for the segmentation of solicitations based on educational levels, Roderick Williams (2007) supported the notion of segmented solicitations based on the age of the prospective donor. For example, fundraisers might focus on organizational efficiency as when they are developing solicitation materials for Mature Donors, while highlighting program outcomes in publications for Young Adult Donors. This researcher suggested fewer mailings to Mature Donors and more frequent mailings to Young Adult Donors; this strategy might result in more contributions to the non-profit (Roderick Williams, 2007, p. 187).

In 2004, Rooney, Mesch, Chin, and Steinberg examined the differences in donor behavior based on gender, race, and marital status. They discovered that single males gave slightly less than single females; however, the differences were insignificant (Rooney et al., 2004). The giving levels of married versus single donors was significant (\$1,866 vs. \$947); there was a slight difference in the giving levels of married men and married women (\$2,216 vs. \$1,600); and Whites and minorities (\$1,572 vs. \$1,114). Married individuals were 5% to 11.6% more likely to donate more than single men and gave significantly more money than single males. Single females were 11.9% more likely to become donors than single men in their overall sample. Adreoni, Brown and Rischall (2003) also concluded that single women were more likely than men to give across all categories of charities which was consistent with the findings from the Rooney et al. (2004) study.

Minorities were not significantly different from Whites in either sample for either the probability of donating at all or the amounts donated (Rooney et al., 2004). The results indicated

that the differences between minorities and Whites were insignificant in both the overall sample and the singles only subsample. These results supported earlier studies which verified that racial differences in giving and volunteering disappeared after controlling for other variables. The researchers also warned that there was strong evidence of the importance of testing for the interaction effects between race and the survey methods.

Finally, there was support for the hypothesis that there were differences in how men, women, Whites, and non-Whites heard questions about their philanthropic behavior, especially among minority women (Rooney et al., 2004). “The interaction effects between the giving methods and race and gender suggested that women and minorities, especially female minorities, responded to the survey methodologies differently from men and Whites” (Rooney et al., 2004, p. 178). The minority women who participated in the study seemed more likely to recall the giving method rather than how the gift was designated. Smith, Shue, Vest and Villareal (1999) clarified ethnographic differences within some minority groups; minorities had a tendency to describe their philanthropic activities as “sharing” and helping” rather than giving to charity. Other researchers confirmed that racial differences in giving and volunteering disappeared after controlling for education, income, and occupational status (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Mesch, Rooney, Chin, & Steinburg, 2002).

Giving to Higher Education

In its most recent report known as the annual Voluntary Support of Education Survey (VSE), the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) reported an slight increase in charitable contributions to colleges and universities in the United States - \$30.30 billion in 2011 compared to \$28 billion in 2010 (CAE, 2012). Adjusted for inflation, overall giving to higher education grew by 4.8%. In 2011, alumni giving rose from 25.4% in 2010 (\$7.1 billion) to 25.7% (\$7.8

billion) in 2011 (CAE, 2012, p. 5). Other sources of contributions to higher education in 2011 included gifts from non-alumni, 18.6% (\$5.65 billion); corporations, 16.6% (\$5.02 billion); foundations, 28.6% (\$8.68 billion); religious organizations, 1% (\$.31 billion); and other organizations, 9% (\$2.85 billion).

In 2010, there was a .4% decrease in alumni annual contributions compared to alumni giving in 2009 (CAE, 2011). The national alumni participation rate also declined in 2010 to 9.8% (compared to 10% in 2009) and the average alumni gift also declined by .4%. The total contributions from alumni and other individuals in 2010 fell to 43%, slightly lower than 43.5% in 2009. Over the years, gifts from alumni and individuals have typically comprised half of all contributions to colleges and universities. The remainder of contributions to higher education in 2010 came from foundations, 30%, corporations, 16.9%, other organizations 9.9% and religious organizations, 1.1%.

The authors of the 2011 CAE study suggested that a full recovery of giving to higher education was yet to materialize. As in the economy as a whole, improvements in higher education giving have been incremental. In 2010, colleges and universities received a large portion of gifts of \$5 million or more. Nearly half of the 65 gifts at this level and higher were designated to institutions of higher education. Donors and nonprofit officials indicated that the popularity of colleges stemmed from the gratitude people felt toward their alma maters, the opportunity to support cutting-edge research, and a sense that strong universities were key to maintaining America's competitive advantage (Di Mento & Preston, 2011).

Direct Mail Communication and Solicitations

Historically, fundraising practitioners at colleges and universities have utilized face-to-face visits, correspondence, and phone calls as the basis for maintaining contact with donors.

Some research has confirmed that direct mail and postcards were the most effective media, followed by phone solicitations (Tsao & Coll, 2005). In 2009, the polling firm International Communications Research (ICR) surveyed 1100 college graduates to learn more about their preferences for receiving information from their alma maters. Approximately 57% of these alumni preferred direct mail compared to 31% who selected e-mail; only 3% of the survey participants identified social networking sites as their preferred information channel.

The alumni who participated in the ICR study also chose regular mail (54%) versus e-mail (23%) as the preferred communication channel for information pertaining to gifts and contributions. About 5% of the alumni indicated a preference for phone contact and 1% chose social networking sites (Pitney Bowes, 2009). These alumni indicated that they were less likely to discard or ignore mail (27%) when they received fundraising messages via direct mail versus phone solicitations (38%), social networking sites (34%) and e-mail (30%). In terms of giving to their college or university, 59% of the alumni indicated that they made a contribution. Approximately 19% of these graduates indicated that they had given at least 10 contributions to their alma mater. Despite the current state of the economy, 37% of the respondents confirmed that they were likely to make a contribution within the next year.

In a study with journalism alumni, Tsao and Coll (2005) discovered that the respondents preferred direct mail by a considerable margin compared to phone solicitations. However, those alumni confirmed that if they were contacted by phone they preferred to interact with other alumni, former classmates, or current students. These alumni were also more receptive to giving a donation after they learned that only half of the university's budget was funded by the state and 13.2% came from tuition and fees.

Parsons and Wethington (1996) conducted a study with journalism and mass communication alumni; they discovered that segmented letter appeals from a school within the university generated a 2.9% response rate, compared to a 1.1% response rate from a university-wide appeal. Segmenting the audience resulted in 95 donors for the school of journalism and mass communication compared to 10 donors to the school of journalism from a university-wide appeal in the previous year.

In a second experiment with alumni from all majors, Parsons and Wethington (1996) segmented the types of solicitations for two groups of alumni. One group received a brochure and letter. Another group received a brochure, a letter, and a handwritten note from a student. Overall, the alumni who received the personal notes from the students contributed \$3,675 compared to \$1,925 from those who did not receive a handwritten note. This experiment illustrated the impact of personalized correspondence when alumni received more than the standard mailing.

Online Communications and Solicitations

Institutions of higher education cannot just “keep up” to effectively engage constituents, whether students or alumni; they must continually explore the edge of new technology (Peterson, 2007). It is apparent that the Internet is becoming a valuable tool for philanthropy. Therefore, it is important to understand how technology affects alumni giving. Web pages, e-mail, message boards, and other technology offer new ways of contacting and building relationships with alumni.

Communication is critical for a university as it looks to “inform” constituents and others about its goals, activities, and offerings and motivate them to take interest. New technology has

enabled university staff to be in touch with alumni more frequently and consistently. One example is the electronic newsletter.

These monthly or quarterly pieces helped to keep alumni informed regarding campus news, research, and activities. In a 2000 study at Stanford University, alumni responded favorably to the receipt of the university's electronic newsletter. Alumni indicated that they felt better informed about their university compared to alumni who did not receive the newsletter (Pearson, 2001). The majority of the recipients of the newsletter were young alumni. The age distribution among the alumni was as follows:

- 46% of alumni were 39 and younger;
- 23% of alumni were 40-59 years old;
- 8% of alumni were 60 and older.

The researcher also sought to verify whether alumni actually read the newsletter. About 10% read the entire issue; 57% of the recipients confirmed that they usually read some of an issue, and 20% confirmed that they skimmed the newsletter. In terms of the recommended frequency of distribution, 80% of alumni suggested a monthly distribution of the newsletter; 7% preferred to receive the newsletter twice per month, and 9% of the alumni preferred to receive the newsletter every other month. Overall, the alumni who received the newsletter indicated that they were more likely than non-recipients to have very positive feelings about Stanford. They also confirmed that they felt a great deal of pride about their Stanford degree, felt an emotional connection to their alma mater, and believed that they did not hear from Stanford just when the school wanted money (Pearson, 2001).

Levine (2008) concluded that the consistent dissemination of electronic alumni newsletters was positively correlated with general alumni giving and alumni participation rates.

A quantitative survey was distributed to 250 staff at private universities to determine whether there was a correlation between a college's communications pieces and alumni giving. The surveys were sent to annual giving and development directors at private institutions with student enrollments between 1,500 and 15,000 throughout the United States. Approximately 58 of the institutions responded for a 23% response rate. The survey focused on giving during the 2005-2006 academic year. Levine's research demonstrated an association between the types of publications and communications pieces and the frequency in which they were sent to alumni. These two factors were important in determining the impact on alumni giving.

Levine (2008) inquired whether the communications unit at each school was autonomous or within another department such as university advancement. The majority of the institutions (57%) reported that their communications departments were not a part of the advancement office. It was of interest to note that the advancement office staff was responsible for sending the annual fund letter (86% of the time), while the communications staff was responsible for the development of the alumni magazine (83% of the time). The electronic newsletters were generally produced by the alumni office staff.

Earlier, Peterson (2007) advocated for the establishment of cross-representative communication teams with personnel from several departments within the institution (marketing, public relations, alumni relations and advancement) to ensure that key communication issues were considered from several perspectives.

All of the universities in the Levine (2008) study produced an alumni magazine and an annual fund appeal letter. About three quarters of the universities also produced electronic versions of their alumni newsletters and annual reports. Electronic newsletters were distributed

with the most frequency, followed by annual fund appeal letters, alumni magazines, and campaign appeal letters.

There was a positive correlation with the frequency of the distribution of the alumni magazine and the alumni e-newsletter when comparing alumni participation rates and general alumni giving. The distribution rate of the alumni magazine helped to generate more gifts to the general fund and the annual fund. The results of the study confirmed a positive correlation between the frequency of annual fund appeals and dollars donated to the annual fund. However, there was not a significant correlation with annual fund participation rates (Levine, 2008). Alumni participation was higher at schools with only undergraduate programs.

Levine (2008) used multiple regression to include any variables that significantly correlated with general fund participation or annual fund participation. Alumni electronic newsletters were associated with higher giving levels to the general fund, but not to the annual fund (Levine, 2008). Undergraduate enrollment and undergraduate participation rates were identified as significant and positive predictors of alumni giving.

Levine (2008) discovered that smaller colleges and universities had higher participation rates than larger institutions. The results of this study corresponded with the existing literature regarding the distribution frequency of alumni magazines and higher donation levels. Overall, alumni magazines and the frequency with which school news was disseminated to alumni had a positive impact on alumni giving.

Effective communication has been identified as a critical component in sustaining relationships with alumni whose behavior was characterized by Mann (2007) through his *relationship marketing theory*. The motivation for alumni giving ranged from intentions that were purely transactional to others that were highly relational. Transactional donors focused on

the benefits associated with their contributions while transformational donors were more concerned with the way that their generosity will impact the organization (Strickland, 2007). Also, the quality and continuity of communication from the university to the alumnus or alumna may create an emotional connection to support fund-raising efforts. Mann's (2007) dimensions of *relationship marketing* coincided with Levine's (2008) research which confirmed the association between higher alumni giving rates and the frequency of communication to alumni.

The emergence of new communication tools through the Internet including e-mail and social media has helped to keep alumni engaged and connected to their alma mater in an unprecedented way. In recent years, universities and non-profits have utilized mobile text messaging to maintain contact with constituents. Have these tools positively affected alumni contributions?

Sun et al. (2007) also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive communications strategy as a vital tool for securing alumni contributions. In order to increase alumni donations, the communications plan must include interaction with past, current, and future students as potential donors. Since alumni experiences were closely related to alumni marketing efforts such as parties, reunions, newsletters and solicitations, the researchers confirmed that these efforts engaged alumni and that alumni were more likely to donate compared to those who were less engaged. "Alumni who were more informed about the university had positive perceptions of it, were more aware of and linked with perceived institutional needs, and, therefore, were more likely to give than those who were not well informed" (Sun et al., 2007, p. 327).

In 2006, the education sector showed especially strong numbers in online giving. Slightly more than half of the respondents to a survey distributed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) reported that 55% of the organizations raised more money online (Skendall,

2007). Of those, 95% raised more money online in 2006 than 2005. Most of the respondents, (73%) raised at least 50% more than the previous year.

In 2010, the Chronicle of Philanthropy surveyed colleges and universities to determine how much money had been raised through online giving. Approximately 184 colleges participated in the survey and reported that \$155 million was generated through online giving in 2006. The median amount raised by the colleges and universities that participated in the survey was \$61,113 (Wallace, 2009). Responses from the study also indicated that colleges and universities were experimenting more with online social networks such as Twitter, in order to communicate and connect with alumni rather than to raise money. However, two colleges were listed among the top 25 institutions to raise money online in 2010. Stanford (a 20% increase) and the University of Pennsylvania (a 72% increase) both received \$9.3 million in online gifts.

Emerging Strategies

Declining alumni participation rates and the absence of strategies to connect with young alumni have compelled college leaders and fundraisers to explore ways to use the Internet and social media to enhance communication and to increase alumni giving. For example, Blue State Digital, a communications consulting company, utilized a strategy for higher education that encouraged the segmentation of potential donors by their interests and the depth of their relationships with the university. Messages to alumni not only included an “ask” for a gift; these messages offered an opportunity for alumni to share their stories and experiences at their alma maters. According to Richard Mintz, Vice President for Strategy at Blue State Digital, “Each e-mail was narrowly targeted, action-oriented and situated in the context of an ongoing communications relationship” (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2009, p. A1).

A few years ago, Creighton University partnered with Blue State Digital to launch its interactive e-mail program. Creighton's continuous communication exchange between the university and alumni served as an illustration of Kent and Taylor's (1998) *dialogic communications* model which supported the utilization of the Internet as a mechanism for building and sustaining relationships between an organization and its constituents. In 2009, the Creighton University alumni relations staff sent an e-mail to alumni asking people to cheer on the Blue Jays during March Madness. The university kept track of the alumni who opened the message. These alumni were subsequently contacted by a member of the university's phone-a-thon staff. This strategy allowed the university to use the Internet to separate the alumni who responded from those did not wish to have contact from the university (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2009).

In 2008, Emory University (GA) raised \$700,000 online from alumni and through an educational giving program for undergraduate students. The university started an e-mail campaign with an appeal for recent graduates to join Emory's 834 Club by pledging \$8.34 per month which equated to about \$100 annually. According to Emory's former Senior Associate Vice President for Annual Giving Francine Cronin, "This amount was less daunting to recent graduates than a lump-sum gift and made them more likely to continue giving" (Retrieved from <http://www.harrisconnect.com/testimonials/294-associate-vice-president-for-annual-giving-emory-university>).

During the 2002-2003 academic year, Emory University also experienced a 206% increase in the number of online gifts and a 292% increase in total online giving after partnering with Harris Connect Internet Services to manage its online giving platform. In 2004-2005, the university reported \$259,408 in online gifts compared to \$44,498 in online gifts during the

previous academic year. This growth was attributed to the university's enhanced online giving platform. Emory's new platform included e-mail pledge reminders, e-flash presentations, integrated campaigns (e-mails mirrored direct mail pieces and included an online giving link), and a "make a gift" link on the university's internal and external home pages. In addition, e-mail follow-ups were sent to alumni who were unaccessible by phone after telefund campaigns (Retrieved from <http://www.harrisconnect.com/testimonials/294-associate-vice-president-for-annual-giving-emory-university>).

Rosemont College, in Philadelphia, developed a three-phased media campaign with the goal of improving relationships with young alumni who graduated between 1998 and 2008. By expanding its young alumni connections with Rosemont, the college leadership hoped to encourage these alumni to eventually become donors (Caslon, 2010).

The first phase began in late 2008 with concurrent e-mail and direct mail messages. This initial communication effort was designed to collect information to cleanse the database, update addresses, and create each graduate's profile. Young alumni received a personalized landing page (PURL) where they updated contact information, indicated when and if they wanted to attend reunion and alumni events, and indicated their preferred time of the year to return to campus. The personalized landing page offered each graduate an opportunity to connect with his or her peers through Rosemont's Alumni Facebook page (Caslon, 2010).

During the second phase (December 2008), alumni were contacted again via direct mail and e-mail. This phase was designed to continue to build relationships with those alumni who responded to the initial contact and also gave those who had not responded another opportunity to participate.

An appeal for a gift was made during the final phase of the campaign in March 2009 by direct mail and e-mail. Each graduate was encouraged to make a gift through his or her personalized landing page (PURL). Some of the direct mail pieces contained information pertaining to the scholarships and extracurricular activities of the graduate. Mailers that included the extracurricular activities generated a 24% response rate vs. a 17% response rate for the mailed pieces that did not have this information. Overall, the Rosemont campaign concluded with a 23% response rate from alumni who visited their personalized landing pages (PURL); 85% of these alumni completed the survey on their personalized landing page; and 18% provided new contact information. The e-mail contact generated a 64% response rate and 26% of those respondents joined the Rosemont Alumni Facebook Page (Caslon, 2010). This project reiterated the importance of building relationships prior to the solicitation phase. More importantly, it emphasized the importance of connecting with alumni in their preferred format; for this group of young alumni the use of the personalized landing page (PURL) was extremely successful. The personal landing page with the recipient's name attracted their attention and motivated young alumni to respond. The timing of the first communication in late 2008 was also critical. During the holiday season people connect with old friends; Rosemont College tied into this sentiment during Phase One of its three-phased campaign (Caslon, 2010).

Generational Giving Channels

Overall, it appears that direct mail still generates the highest rate of charitable contributions. In a 2010 study conducted by Convio, Edge Research, and the Sea Change Strategies Group, direct mail was identified as the best channel for soliciting and collecting small gifts. This study focused on the charitable giving habits and solicitation preferences of individuals segmented into four groups: Matures (born before 1946), Baby Boomers (born

between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980, and Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1991). The results of the survey confirmed that Matures were accustomed to receiving direct mail and among these four generational groups, Matures were the most responsive to direct mail solicitations. Direct mail was selected as their preferred charity information and giving channel (77%); however, 25% of the Matures also made contributions by phone.

Giving by mail was also the preferred method among Baby Boomers, however, not at the same rate as Matures. Approximately 54% of Baby Boomers confirmed that they gave charitable gifts by mail. Some Baby Boomers gave online (31%), and 16% of these individuals indicated that they made contributions by phone. Checkout donations were the primary giving channel for Generation X donors (67%) - contributions made in retail and grocery stores at the checkout counter. Typically, retailers agree to support a non-profit with a contribution display or through a solicitation made by a clerk when a consumer completes a transaction for goods and services. Generation X donors indicated that checks by mail (43%) were their second most popular form of giving, followed by online gifts (31%). The primary donation channel for Generation Y donors was online giving (29%), and secondly, checks by mail (26%). Giving through third-party vendors was their third preference (25%). The results of this study emphasized the importance of combining both direct mail and e-mail solicitations for younger generations which supported the notion that multi-channel solicitation strategies were important for this group of donors (Convio, Edge Research, & Sea Change Strategies, 2010).

Donors in all of the generational groups, except Matures, reported giving through multiple channels including e-commerce, online giving, event fundraising, giving as a tribute (honorary or memorial giving) and monthly debit programs. Some donors indicated that

mobile/text donations were also important giving methods (Convio, Edge Research, & Sea Change Strategies, 2010). While, the results of the study confirmed that direct mail is still “alive and well,” solicitation messages may warrant modification. First, the content and style of direct mail packaging should vary along generational lines to improve response rates. Secondly, direct mail must be integrated with other channels of communication and solicitation. The Convio researchers challenged development personnel to build and regularly review integrated campaign calendars that encompass varied communication and solicitation strategies across multiple channels.

Demographics and Online Giving

The staff of non-profit organizations continue to examine giving channels and giving patterns to identify the most effective means of communication to constituents. In 2008, Harris Interactive conducted a study of online giving patterns by gender, age, race, marital status, income and level of education. Among the donors who said that they had given online, 20% of the respondents were male; 18% of the online donors were females. “We found that online donors had a slightly higher representation of men than in traditional direct mail donor files,” said Michael Johnson, president of HJC New Media in Toronto (Clolery, 2008). About 35% of the online donors in this study had post-graduate degrees, compared to 23% of the graduates with an undergraduate degree. About 15% of the online donors in this study earned a high school diploma and 12% had attended high school.

Respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 indicated that they were influenced to give through a search engine, website visits, or special events. In the 25 to 34 age category, direct mail, a search engine or website visits were influential factors. Individuals in the 45 to 54 age category were persuaded to give online through direct mail and special events. Direct mail, a

web search or site visit also guided the decision to give online among donors who were 55 to 65. Direct mail motivated donors age 65 and over to go to online giving sites.

Reduced or limited access to the Internet may be a factor in who gives online. The Harris Interactive researchers concluded that donors in lower income brackets were more likely to give online after they received a direct mail solicitation compared to donors who went directly to the Internet to give. About 37% of the donors in this study with incomes between \$35,000 and \$50,000 were influenced to give online after they received a direct mail solicitation.

The respondents in the 45 to 54 age category constituted the largest group of online donors (23%), followed by individuals in the 35-44 age category (20%). About 18% of those in the remaining age categories indicated that they gave online. “Married donors who gave online indicated that they were twice as likely (21%) to be influenced to give after they received a direct mail appeal versus those who gave after looking through search engines (10%) or those who attended a special event (10%)” (Clolery, 2008, p. 18). Approximately 27% of the respondents with children ages 18 and older said they were most likely to go online after they received information in the mail. Individuals with children ages 10 and younger (19%) indicated that they responded to an appeal because of a search engine or website visit. In terms of ethnicity, 20% of the online donors in this study were White, 13% were Black and 20% were Hispanic.

Integrated Marketing Communications

The notion of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) to keep donors engaged through multiple communication channels was the focus of a research study conducted by Convio and Strategic One (2007). The study was designed to quantify the influence of eCRM – online constituent relationship management in a multi-channel communications context. Under an eCRM model, information technology is utilized to enhance relationships with constituents

through consistent electronic communication. This Convio and Strategic One study was based on the premise that today's constituents operate in a multi-channel mode. For example, although a prospective donor receives a direct mail solicitation, that person may decide to conduct research online by viewing the organization's website, and then, submit a gift online instead of sending the contribution by mail. Online marketing also influenced requests for new channels of information. According to the results of the survey, more donors who traditionally gave online also signed up to receive e-mail communications (Convio and Strategic One, 2007).

The Convio and Strategic One (2007) group confirmed that donor engagement through multiple communication channels had greater long term value, retention and lifetime value than donors who were only engaged through a single communication channel. A donor's long term value was calculated by the increase in donor gifts over the number of years that gifts were received from an individual. The Convio and Strategic One study verified that there was increased value in gifts (\$44.71 – a 39% increase) when online donation and solicitation channels were added for donors who were initially offline donors. Also, donors who received electronic communications outperformed the donors who only received direct mail solicitations.

In the Convio and Strategic One (2007) study, those who received information via e-mail gave twice as more than direct mail donors during their lifetimes. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) was optimized when organizations compiled e-mail addresses through all forms of contact, including direct mail reply pieces, online registrations, special events and telephone calls. Website registrations were another opportunity for collecting mailing addresses from online visitors by offering to deliver welcome/information packs through direct mail. "Once mailing and e-mail addresses have been acquired for a donor, a customized

communications stream integrating online and offline communications should be established to convert single channel donors into dual channel donors” (Convio and Strategic One, 2007, p. 5).

Social Media Communication

In a study released by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project team it was revealed that older users were enthusiastic about embracing the new technology (Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project, 2010). Approximately 47% of Internet users ages 50 to 64 and one in four users ages 65 (26%) and older confirmed that they used social media networking sites (Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project, 2010). Social networking use among Internet users ages 50 and older rose – from just 22% in 2009 to over 42% in 2010.

Although Young Adult Internet users ages 18-29 constituted the majority of the individuals utilizing sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn (86%), the use of social networking sites by individuals ages 50-64 grew by 88% and by 100% for those ages 65 and older, compared to a growth rate of only 13% for individuals ages 18-29. Also, younger adults reported using e-mail less than those in the 50-64 age category. The Pew Study revealed that 92% of the Internet users ages 50 to 64 who responded to the survey sent or read their e-mail messages every day.

Kent and Taylor (1998) advocated for an exploration of the use and utility of the Internet to build organizational-public relationships. They stressed the importance of the interaction between an organization and its publics as vital for improving and maintaining relationships. Their *dialogic communication* model focused on the importance of maintaining relationships with online constituents. This concept embraced a communicative “give and take” relationship that is guided by two principles. First, individuals who engage in dialogue do not necessarily have to agree and secondly, both parties must share a willingness to communicate and reach a

mutually satisfying position. Kent and Taylor's (1998) notion of *dialogic communication* encouraged relationship formation and maintenance as important processes in mutual adaptation and contingent response. Over time both parties expect continuous feedback and value the opportunity to engage in dialogue as a means of sharing their views and opinions. Thus, the feedback loop may be an appropriate starting point for dialogic communication between an organization and its constituents. Kent and Taylor (1998) emphasized the importance of adequate resources for website maintenance and adequate staff to provide timely responses. Response was a major part of the dialogic communication model; furthermore, the content of the response is also important for relationship building. If genuine dialogue is to occur, publics must have their questions and concerns addressed if the organization wished to sustain the relationship.

In sum, this review of the literature revealed that the quality, frequency, and mode of communication are important components that support the growth of alumni giving. Hoyt (2005) recommended an examination of the effectiveness of different solicitation strategies in the future. In his study, alumni frequently discussed solicitation methods, with division among the respondents concerning preferences for mailings, phone calls, online options, or televised fundraisers (Hoyt, 2005).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify alumni communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between several independent variables (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels) and to provide recommendations for future use. Additional information concerning alumni demographics and their relationship to or lack of relationship to solicitation messages and preferences were examined. Frequency counts were used to determine alumni preferences by demographic variable. Then the Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine if there were significant differences among the preferences by demographics. In this chapter, the methodology used to answer the questions that were the focus of this dissertation is presented.

The responses from the study participants were collected and stored by the researcher online using Qualtrics, a web-based software program. This chapter includes the problem statement, the research questions, a description of the study participants, a description of the instrument used to collect the data and answer the research questions, the statistical tools used to answer the research questions, and the data analysis procedure. This study was designed to determine if there was a difference between demographics and alumni communication and solicitation preferences.

Research Questions

Each question, its associated hypothesis, and the data analysis tool used to answer the research questions are described below.

Solicitation Preference and Hypothesis Question One

What is the difference in the preferred solicitation method (direct mail or online) based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational or income level?

Research hypothesis: There is a difference in the preferred solicitation method based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational or income level. The responses from survey questions 3 through 10 and item 21 were used to answer this question.

The Chi-Square Test of Independence command in the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 was used to analyze the responses to this question.

Communication Preference and Hypothesis Question Two

What is the difference in the preferred communication method (direct mail or online) based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational or income level? Research hypothesis: There is a difference in the preferred communication method based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational or income level. The responses from survey questions 3 through 10 and item 15 were used to answer this question. The Chi-Square Test of Independence command in the SPSS version 19 was used to analyze the responses this question.

Communication Frequency Preference and Hypothesis Question Three

What is the difference in the preferred frequency of the receipt of information based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels? The research hypothesis associated with this research question is: There is a difference regarding the preferred frequency of the receipt of information based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels. The responses from survey questions 3 through 10 and item 13 were used to answer this question. The frequency count command in the SPSS version 19 was used to analyze the responses to this question.

Impact of Information and Giving Decisions and Hypothesis Question Four

Is there a difference in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving decisions? The research hypothesis associated with this question is: There is a difference in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving decisions based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels. The responses from survey questions 3 through 10 and item 17 were used to answer this question. The Chi-Square Test of Independence command in the SPSS version 19 was used to analyze the responses to this question.

Study Participants

For the purpose of this study, an alumni donor was defined as an individual with a valid e-mail address who made a contribution to Appalachian State University within a ten year period between 2001 and 2011. The data regarding alumni donors with valid e-mail addresses were compiled by the staff in the Office of Advancement Services at Appalachian State University. The Associate Vice Chancellor in the Appalachian State University Office of University Advancement was the conduit through which the formal request to participate in the study was communicated to alumni. This invitation to participate included a description of the study, its purpose and benefits, a confidentiality statement, and the timeline for distribution of the survey. Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board, an online survey was distributed to alumni donors.

The Research Instrument

A 29-question survey was designed by the researcher under the guidance and approval of the methodologist. On May 13, 2012, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the IRB approval for this study is included in Appendix A. The survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of alumni and development professionals in higher education prior to

distribution for content validity. Content validity is a subjective process in which experts in a field review questions for their intended purpose (Huck, 2004).

The survey was created and imported into Qualtrics, a web-based survey program (see Appendix E). Access to the Qualtrics program was provided to the researcher through the Department of Information Technology Services at East Carolina University. The advantages of using the Internet for survey distribution include the cost savings associated with eliminating the printing and mailing of survey instruments as well as the time and cost savings of having returned survey data already in an electronic format (Cobanuglu, Warde, & Moreo, 2001).

Although studies on Internet-based research is limited, findings are beginning to appear in the literature. Electronically delivered surveys have been found to yield lower response rates when compared with surveys that were mailed (Shannon & Bradshaw, 2002). Cook, Heath and Thompson (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of factors influencing response rates in Internet-based surveys. They found that follow-up contacts with non-respondents, personalized contacts, and contacting sampled people prior to sending out the survey were the three dominant factors in higher response rates. Solomon (2001) stated that personalized e-mail cover letters, follow-up reminders by e-mail, pre-notification of the intent of the survey, simpler formats, and plain design have all been shown to improve response rates for Web-based surveys. In order to increase response rates, the survey designers need to consider why a person would respond to a survey – their motivation. Dillman (2000) asserted that an individual's motivation to respond to surveys was vested in the *Social Exchange Theory*, that by responding to the survey, respondents would be compensated in a way that meets some of their needs.

Due to concerns with low response rates, the researcher included an introductory section in the survey that highlighted the importance of the collection of the data and how the findings

would impact future communication and solicitation strategies with alumni not only at the institution selected for the study but also alumni of other colleges and universities. The survey was divided into four categories: (a) demographic information (questions 3 through 10.); (b) questions pertaining to communication messages and preferences (questions 11 through 18); (c) questions related to solicitation messages and preferences, and making contributions (questions 19 through 28); and (d) perceptions regarding the Internet as a viable tool for receiving information (questions 29 through 31). The demographic variables included gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels. The questions were designed to identify each participant's preferred method of communication and solicitation – direct mail or online. The survey participants were also asked to identify their preferred frequency of communication from the university. Finally, the survey participants were asked whether communication from their alma mater had an impact on their decisions to make contributions.

After the panel review, the survey was completed by a group of alumni from the institution selected for this study. The reactions of the alumni were related to the ease of comprehension and the timing to complete the survey; there were no recommendations for changes to the survey instrument. The purpose of the test distribution was to evaluate question formatting, grouping, timing, and the ease at which respondents were able to answer the questions. The individuals who participated in the test agreed that questions were easy to comprehend and that there was a logical flow in the order of questions.

The average survey completion time with the test group was 7-10 minutes. Thoughtful formatting addresses respondent motivation in part by reducing the respondent's apprehension in their involvement in and performance on the survey and increasing their trust in the purpose of the survey (Dillman, 2000).

The researcher utilized the test-retest method to confirm the reliability of the survey instrument. This aspect of reliability is said to occur when the same or similar scores are obtained with repeated testing with the same group of respondents. The purpose of the test-retest method was to determine whether the scores were consistent from one time to the next. Test-rest reliability was estimated with correlations between the scores at Time 1 and those at Time 2 (Retrieved from www.michaeljmillerphd.com/index.html). After 7 days, these alumni participated in a second test. In a review of 748 research studies conducted in agricultural and extension education, Radhakrishna, Leite, and Baggett (2003) found that 64% of the researchers used questionnaires. They also discovered that a third of the studies reviewed did not report procedures for establishing validity (31%) or reliability (33%) (Radhakrishna, 2007).

The report that was generated by the staff in the Office of Advancement Services at Appalachian State University consisted of the e-mail addresses of 14,769 alumni donors. The survey was distributed to alumni donors by e-mail between May 23, 2012 and May 28, 2012 (see Appendix E); from this total, 2,667 surveys were returned as “*undeliverable*”¹. A total of 12,091 alumni received the survey. Approximately 1,233 surveys were completed or partially completed which represents a 10.19% response rate.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the Chi-Square Test of Independence. This test was used to examine the differences between two categorical variables. The Chi-Square test is one example of a non-parametric test. The use of non-parametric testing allows the analysis of data that comes in the form of frequencies (Salkind, 2004). The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to

¹ In addition, seven alumni donors reported that they had technical difficulties and could not open the survey. After the survey notification letter was disseminated a graduate commented regarding lack of Internet access during the time period of survey distribution and therefore, would not be able to not participate in the study. Three other alumni refused to participate in the survey

determine whether two variables were independent of each other. In this study, a two sample chi-square test was used to examine two dimensions – whether communication and solicitation preferences were related to the independent variables.

The independent variables in this study were age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels. The dependent variables included the preferred solicitation method (direct mail or online), the preferred communication method (direct mail or online), the preferred frequency of communication, and the impact of the receipt of information. The purpose of this study was to identify alumni communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between several independent variables (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels) and to provide recommendations for future use. The first question was designed to determine whether there were differences between age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels and the preferred solicitation method. The second question was designed to determine whether there were differences between age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels and the preferred communication method. The third question in the study was designed to determine whether there were differences between age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational and income levels and the preferred frequency of communication. The final question in the study was designed to determine whether there were differences in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving decisions based on the following independent variables – age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels.

Summary

In this chapter, an overview of the research methodology utilized in this study was presented. A quantitative analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences in

alumni communication and solicitation preferences (direct mail or online) based on age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, educational or income levels. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board on May 13, 2012. A web-based survey program known as Qualtrics was utilized for the distribution of the survey and the collection of the data. The alumni participants in this study were donors with valid e-mail addresses who made contributions to Appalachian State University between 2001 and 2011. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19, to determine if there were differences between the preferred communication and solicitation methods and age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to test whether or not two variables were independent of one another.

The general purpose of Chi-Square analysis was to learn whether there were differences between several independent or predictor variables and the dependent variables.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify alumni communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between several independent variables (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels) and to provide recommendations for future use. An online survey was distributed to alumni donors at a public university in North Carolina. This chapter includes a description of the data analysis, a description of the survey participants, and a discussion regarding the findings from each research question.

The demographic data used for the testing of the research questions are presented in Table 3. After the distribution of the survey instrument and the collection of the data age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels were recoded from the raw data (see Figures 1-5) that was collected to address the issue of small group sizes and to aggregate the data and aid interpretation. Recoding is a way of combining the values of a variable into fewer categories. In many instances the raw data is more useful if it is collapsed into a fewer categories. When the accuracy of ratio or interval data is not needed, recoding is an appropriate procedure in SPSS. In this study, the age and income variables were recoded (SPSS, Version 19, pp. 31-34). The process is completed when old values and new values are specified in SPSS, the ranges of the new values are assigned and named. For example, there were six categories pertaining to relationship status. Married and living with partner were combined to *married/cohabitating*; single, separated, divorced, and widowed were combined into *single*. The ages of the respondents were initially collected in eight categories. Age categories were combined to represent major adult developmental stages from the original data. They were *early adulthood* (45 years-old and under), *middle adulthood* (46 years-old to 65), and *late adulthood* (over 65). Education was recoded to undergraduate and graduate degrees. While bachelor's

Table 3

Demographic Variables

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	683	55.4	57.3
	Female	508	41.2	42.7
	<i>Missing</i>	42	3.4	
Relationship Status (marital status)	Married/Cohabiting	920	74.6	77.2
	Single	271	22.0	22.8
	<i>Missing</i>	42	3.4	
Adulthood stage(age) (under 45) (45-65) (over 65)	Early	394	32.0	33.1
	Middle	636	51.6	53.4
	Late	162	13.1	13.6
	<i>Missing</i>	41	3.3	
Education (degree)	Undergraduate	668	54.2	56.9
	Graduate	506	41.0	43.1
	<i>Missing</i>	59	4.8	
Income (under \$39,999) (\$40,000-\$99,999) (over \$100,000)	Income Bracket 1	74	6.0	6.5
	Income Bracket 2	522	42.3	45.9
	Income Bracket 3	542	44.0	47.6
	<i>Missing</i>	9	7.7	

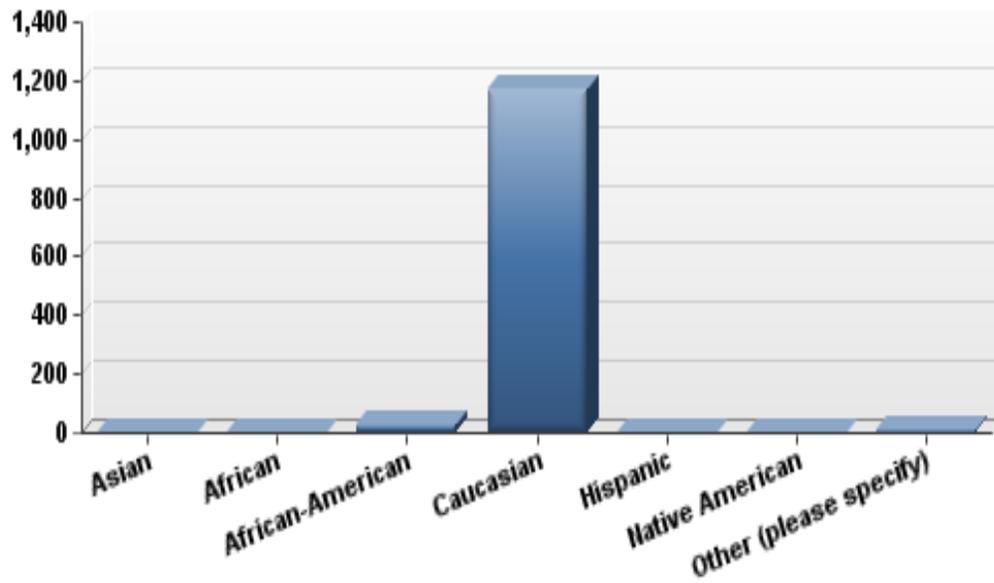


Figure 1. Survey participants by ethnicity.



Figure 2. Survey participants by gender.

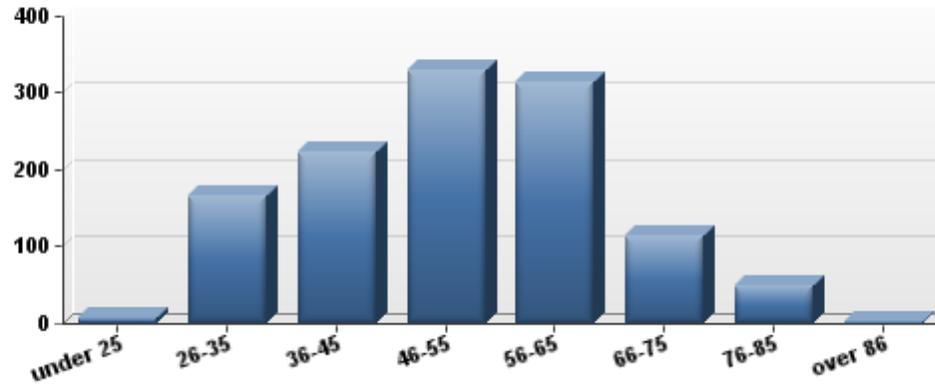


Figure 3. Survey participants by age.

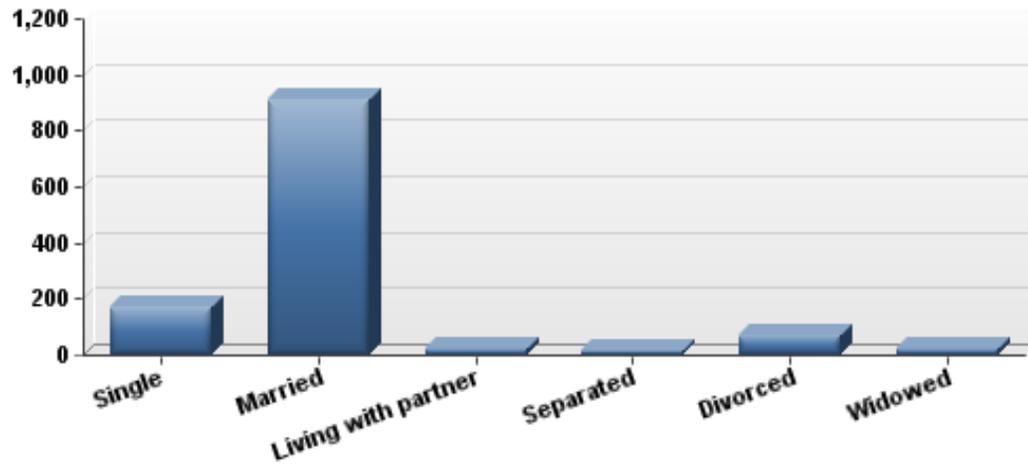


Figure 4. Survey participants by marital status.

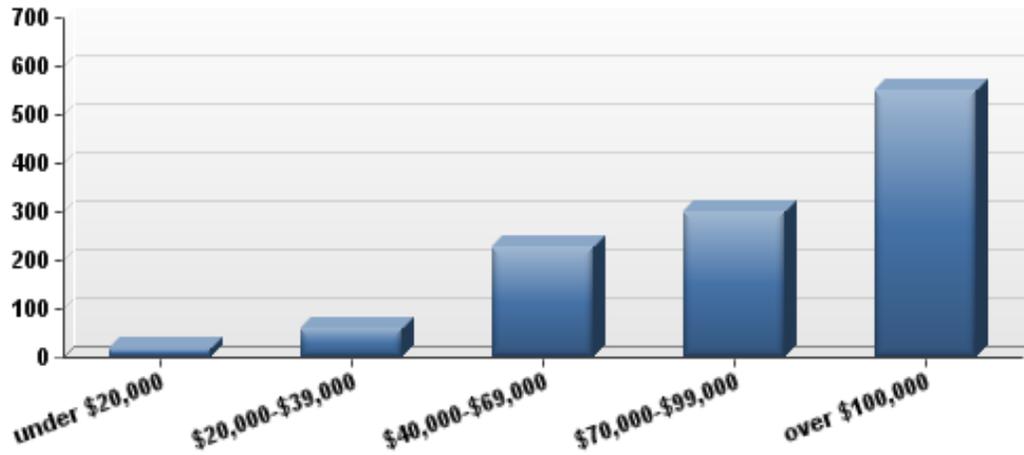


Figure 5. Survey participants by household incomes.

degree (i.e. undergraduate) was an original category, the four categories for graduate degrees were combined into graduate degree. Eighteen “other” responses under degree were excluded from the analysis due to the uncertainty as to how to define this group. Income was recoded from five categories into three – *Income Bracket 1* (less than \$39,999), *Income Bracket 2* (\$40,000 to \$99,999), and *Income Bracket 3* (over than \$100,000. Survey questions 3 through 10 pertained to alumni demographics and five of the six independent variables utilized in the study.

Study Participants

The first section of the survey (Questions 3 to 10) consisted of demographic questions. Overall, males represented approximately 57.3% (n = 683) of the respondents while females represented 42.7% (n = 508) of the participants. In terms of ethnicity, 96.6% (n = 1151) of the alumni who responded to Question 4 of the survey indicated that they were Caucasian. Due to the low number of responses in other categories, ethnicity was not used as a variable in the final analysis of the data. A detailed summary of the respondents by ethnicity is included in Figure 1.

Alumni donors in the 46 to 55 age category (n= 325) (27.3%) constituted the largest group of respondents, followed by individuals in the 56 to 65 age category (n= 311) (26.1%). Alumni donors ages 36 to 45 (n= 220) ranked third (18.5%), followed by alumni in the 26 to 35 age category (n=166) (13.9%). Respondents in the between the ages of 66 and 75 (n=113) (9.5%) represented the fifth largest group of respondents, followed by alumni in the 76 to 85 age category (n = 47) (3.9%). There were eight alumni under 25 who participated in the study (.7%) Two alumni donors over the age of 86 represented the smallest number of participants – (n= 2) only .2% of the total. For the purposes of the data analysis the eight age categories were recoded into three: (1) *early adulthood* (alumni under age 45), (2) *middle adulthood* (alumni ages 46 to 65), and *late adulthood* (alumni ages 65 and older).

Approximately 75% (n=895) of the total survey participants selected “married” as their relationship status; 14.1% (n=168) of the respondents selected “single” as their status. Sixty-nine alumni (5.8%) indicated that they were “divorced;” 2.1% (n= 25) of the respondents selected “live with a partner.” Twenty-one respondents, 1.8%, selected “widowed,” as their relationship status while 1.1% (n=13) selected “separated”. The marital status categories were recoded from six into two categories into married/cohabitating, 74.6% (n=920), and single, 22% (n=271).

Almost half of the survey participants, 47.6% (n=542), reported total household incomes over \$100,000 annually. There were 25.9% (n=295) of the participants who reported incomes ranging between \$70,000 and \$99,999, and 19.9% (n= 227) of the respondents with incomes between \$40,000 and \$69,999. In two other categories (5.1%) (n=58) of the alumni donors reported total household incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999. About 1.4% of the respondents (n=16) indicated total household incomes under \$20,000 annually. The income categories were recoded from five categories into three – *Bracket 1* - under \$39,999 – 6.5% (n=74); *Bracket 2* - \$40,000 to \$99,999 – 45.9% (n= 522), and *Bracket 3* – over \$100,000 – 47.6% (n= 542).

Question 10 pertained to the respondent’s educational level. More than half of these alumni, 56% (n=668), earned bachelor’s degrees; 37.2% (n=444) of these alumni earned a master’s degree. Forty-four alumni – 3.7% - indicated that they had earned a doctorate degree, and 1.4% (n= 17) earned professional degrees (J.D., M.D., Psychology, etc.). One individual, .1%, selected the option “both a doctorate and a professional degree,” while 1.5% (n=18) selected “other” degree. These degree categories were recoded as 56% (n=668) undergraduate and 41.4% - graduate (n=506). The raw data compiled for this study containing the demographic breakdown by age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, income and educational levels are included in Figures 1-5. Table 3 illustrates the demographic variables after recoding.

Summary of Responses

The frequencies and percentages for the items used to answer the research questions are presented in Table 4. Valid percentages were reported throughout this summary. For research questions 1 through 3, the respondents were asked to rank order their preferences for requests for contributions, preferences for the mode of communication from the university, and the preferred frequency of communication. Research Question Four explored whether communication from the university affected the alumni donor's giving decisions. While each survey respondent was asked to rank order three preferences for Research Questions 1-3, only the highest ranking response of each respondent was presented. For example, in Table 3 under Research Question One U.S. Mail (direct mail) was the preferred method for solicitations 52.4% (n= 526) of the alumni donors. E-mail ranked second as the preferred method for solicitations of by 33% (n=331) of the respondents. Phone calls were selected by 6.6% (n=66) of the alumni donors. Finally, a solicitation during a meeting with a university staff member was preferred by only 4.7% (n=47) of the respondents.

When asked to select the preferred method of communication, E-mail/text messaging was the first choice - 81.9% (n=866) of the respondents; only 11.5% (n=122) of the alumni donors selected U.S. Mail. Question Three addressed the preferred frequency of communication. Approximately 32% (n= 363) of the respondents selected "monthly," while 28.4% (n=322) selected "weekly." For the purposes of this study, "bi-monthly or less" and "daily and weekly" were combined in the discussion of the findings for Research Question Three. As with the demographic variables, some collapsing of categories was necessary due to the small number of responses. For example, in Research Question One: Preference for Solicitations (survey question 21), Facebook and Text Messaging were collapsed into the *Other* category. Twitter and

Table 4

Research Question Frequencies and Percentages

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Research Question 1: Preference for Solicitation			
Method			
U.S. Mail	526	42.7	52.4
E-mail	331	26.8	33.0
Phone	66	5.4	6.6
During Meeting	47	3.8	4.7
Other	33	2.7	3.3
<i>Missing</i>	230	18.7	
Research Question 2: Preference for Communication			
Method			
U.S. Mail	122	9.9	11.5
E-mail/Text	866	70.2	81.9
University Website	48	3.9	4.5
Other	22	1.8	2.1
<i>Missing</i>	175	14.2	
Research Question 3: Preferred Frequency of Communication			
None	33	2.7	2.9
Daily	55	4.5	4.8
Weekly	322	26.1	28.4
Bi-monthly	211	17.1	18.6
Monthly	363	29.4	32.0
Quarterly	151	12.2	13.3
<i>Missing</i>	98	7.9	
Research Question 4: Does the information that you receive from Appalachian affect your decision to make a contribution?			
Never	205	16.6	18.0
Rarely	418	33.9	36.6
Sometimes	455	36.9	39.9
Often/All of the Time	63	5.1	5.5
<i>Missing</i>	92	7.5	

Note. Research Questions 1 – 3 include only 1st ranked responses.

Facebook were collapsed into the *Other* category in the responses (survey question 15) to Research Question Two – Preference for Communication. Research Question 4 explored whether communication impacted the alumni donor’s giving decision, *Often and All of the Time* were combined into one category (survey question 18). The frequency of responses to the four research questions is summarized in Table 4.

Solicitation Preference and Hypothesis One

Research Hypothesis One: There is a difference in the preferred solicitation method based on the age, gender, ethnicity*, marital status, education and income level of the alumna or alumnus. The responses to survey questions 3 through 10 and 21 were used in the data analysis to address this question. The hypothesis was tested through the utilization of the Chi-Square Test of Independence to determine whether significant differences existed between the preferred solicitation method (direct mail or online) and the independent variables. Chi-square cross-tabulations were created to test the statistical significance of the relationships.

The Chi-square Test of Independence results for Research Question One found a significant interaction for age (adulthood stage) (see Table 5). Therefore the research hypothesis in Research Question One was accepted.

It appeared that early, middle, and late adulthood respondents preferred U.S. mail and E-mail as the primary method of communication for solicitations. However, there were differences between all three groups as far as proportion of preference. Overall, 62.7% (n= 79) of late adulthood respondents had the highest preference for U.S. mail followed by 55.8% (n= 296) of middle adulthood donors, and 43.6% (n= 151) of early adulthood donors. By contrast, E-mail was the preferred solicitation method among 43.4% (n= 150) of early adulthood donors followed by middle and late adulthood donors at 29.2% (n=155) and 19.8% (n= 25)

Table 5

Preference for Solicitation Method from Alma Mater by Selected Demographic Variables

		Preference for Solicitation Method					Pearson Chi- Square
		U.S. Mail	E- mail	Phone	During Meeting	Other	
Gender	Male (<i>n (%)</i>)	293 (51.5)	199 (35.0)	30 (5.3)	29 (5.1)	18 (3.2)	$\chi^2(4) =$ 6.07, <i>p</i> = .19
	Female	233 (53.9)	130 (30.1)	36 (8.3)	18 (4.2)	15 (3.5)	
Marital Status (Relationship Status)	Married/Cohabiting	404 (52.5)	252 (32.7)	50 (6.5)	36 (4.7)	28 (3.6)	$\chi^2(4) =$ 1.24, <i>p</i> = .87
	Single	122 (52.8)	77 (33.3)	16 (6.9)	11 (4.8)	5 (2.2)	
Adulthood Stage(age)	Early(under 45)	151 (43.6)	150 (43.4)	16 (4.6)	14 (4.0)	15 (4.3)	$\chi^2(8) =$ 37.72, <i>p</i> < .00
	Middle(45-65)	296 (55.8)	155 (29.2)	40 (7.5)	23 (4.3)	16 (3.0)	
	Late(over 65)	79 (62.7)	25 (19.8)	10 (7.9)	10 (7.9)	2 (1.6)	
Education (degree)	Undergraduate	285 (51.0)	192 (34.3)	39 (7.0)	24 (4.3)	19 (3.4)	$\chi^2(4) =$ 1.86, <i>p</i> = .76
	Graduate	235 (54.7)	133 (30.9)	27 (6.3)	21 (4.9)	14 (3.3)	
Income	Bracket 1 (under \$39,999)	29 (50.0)	19 (32.8)	5 (8.6)	3 (5.2)	2 (3.4)	$\chi^2(8) =$ 12.80, <i>p</i> = .12
	Bracket 2 (\$40,000-\$99,999)	240 (54.5)	143 (32.5)	31 (7.0)	10 (2.3)	16 (3.6)	
	Bracket 3 (over \$100,000)	229 (50.0)	156 (34.1)	27 (5.9)	32 (7.0)	14 (3.1)	
	Total	526 (52.4)	331 (33.0)	66 (6.6)	47 (4.7)	33 (3.3)	

respectively. Table 4 highlights the preferred alumni donor solicitation method based on gender, marital status (relationship status), age (adulthood stage), education (degree) and income levels.

Communication Preference and Hypothesis Two

This question addressed the preferred method of communication from the university (direct mail or online) based on the alumni donor's gender, age (adulthood stage), ethnicity,*marital status (relationship status), educational (degree) and income levels.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is a difference in the communication preference based on the age, ethnicity,* gender, marital status, educational and income levels of the alumna or alumnus.

Answers from survey questions 3 through 10 and 15 were used to answer this question. The Chi-Square Test of Independence results for Research Question Two found a significant interaction for age (adulthood stage). Therefore, the research hypothesis in Question Two was accepted.

Approximately 21.9% (n= 30) of alumni donors over the age of 65 had the highest preference for communication through U.S. mail compared to middle adulthood and younger respondents (10.6% (n= 59) and 9.0% (n=33) respectively). By contrast, the respondents in the early and middle adulthood categories preferred e-mail/text messages by nearly 10% more than late adulthood respondents. Table 6 illustrates the preferred communication method of alumni donors based on age (adulthood stage), gender, marital status (relationship status), educational (degree) and income levels.

Communication Frequency Preference and Hypothesis Three

This research question addressed the alumni donor's preferred communication frequency based on an analysis of the demographic composition of the alumni surveyed. Research Hypothesis: There is a difference in the preferred communication frequency based on gender,

Table 6

Preference for Communication Method from Alma Mater by Selected Demographic Variables

		Preference for Communication Method				Pearson Chi-Square
		U.S. Mail	E-mail/Text	University Website	Other	
Gender	Male (<i>n (%)</i>)	72 (12.0)	483 (80.6)	32 (5.3)	12 (2.0)	$\chi^2(3) = 2.44, p = .49$
	Female	50 (11.0)	380 (83.3)	16 (3.5)	10 (2.2)	
Marital status (Relationship Status)	Married/Cohabiting	93 (11.4)	670 (81.8)	41 (5.0)	15 (1.8)	$\chi^2(3) = 2.94, p = .40$
	Single	29 (12.3)	193 (81.8)	7 (3.0)	7 (3.0)	
Age(Adulthood stage)	Early (under 45)	33 (9.0)	300 (82.2)	18 (4.9)	14 (3.8)	$\chi^2(6) = 25.12, p < .00$
	Middle (45-65)	59 (10.6)	463 (83.6)	25 (4.5)	7 (1.3)	
	Late (over 65)	30 (21.9)	101 (73.7)	5 (3.6)	1 (0.7)	
Education (degree)	Undergraduate	72 (12.1)	488 (82.0)	21 (3.5)	14 (2.4)	$\chi^2(3) = 4.04, p = .26$
	Graduate	49 (11.0)	364 (81.6)	26 (5.8)	7 (1.6)	
Income	Bracket 1 (under \$39,999)	7 (10.8)	55 (84.6)	2 (3.1)	1 (1.5)	$\chi^2(6) = 4.68, p = .59$
	Bracket 2 (\$40,000-\$99,999)	59 (12.8)	372 (80.5)	18 (3.9)	13 (2.8)	
	High (over \$100,000)	51 (10.5)	402 (82.9)	45 (4.4)	21 (2.1)	
Total		122 (11.5)	866 (81.9)	48 (4.5)	22 (2.1)	

age (adulthood stage), ethnicity*, marital status (relationship status), educational (degree) and income levels.

Responses from survey items 3 through 10 and 13 were used to answer this question. The independent variables of gender, age (adulthood stage), ethnicity*, marital status (relationship status), educational (degree) and income levels were examined for significant interactions. The Chi-Square Test of Independence results for Research Question Three found significant interactions for gender, age (adulthood stage), and income (see Table 7). Therefore, the research hypothesis in Question Three was accepted.

It appeared that males preferred communication from the institution more frequently, 41.5% (n= 267) combined daily and weekly, whereas 75% (n = 366) of the female respondents preferred communication less frequently (bi-monthly or less). Alumni donors 65 and older also reported a preference for less frequent communication – 55.4% (n = 85) of these alumni preferred monthly, quarterly, or no communication compared to middle-aged alumni donors, (ages 45 to 65) and alumni donors under the age of 45 (48.9% (n=294), 43.5% (n= 166) respectively). Finally, it appeared that 51% (n= 255) of the respondents in Income Bracket 2 preferred communication less frequently (monthly or quarterly) compared to respondents in Income Brackets 1 and 3 – 36.8% (n=25) and 40.3% (n= 207) respectively. In general, the communication frequency preference depended on three demographic characteristics – age, gender, and income. Table 7 illustrates the preferred frequency of communication by the independent variables of gender, age (adulthood stage), marital status (relationship status), educational (degree) and income levels.

Table 7

Preference for Communication Frequency from Alma Mater by Selected Demographic Variables

		Preference for the Frequency of Communication						Pearson Chi- Square
		None	Daily	Weekly	Bi- monthly	Monthly	Quarterly	
Gender	Male (n (%))	20 (3.1)	47 (7.3)	220 (34.2)	111 (17.3)	183 (28.5)	62 (9.6)	$\chi^2(5) = 59.47, p < .00$
	Female	13 (2.7)	7 (1.4)	102 (20.9)	99 (20.3)	179 (36.7)	88 (18.0)	
Marital Status (Relationship status)	Married/Cohabiting	27 (3.1)	45 (5.1)	254 (29.0)	166 (18.9)	270 (30.8)	114 (13.0)	$\chi^2(5) = 4.00, p = .55$
	Single	6 (2.4)	9 (3.5)	68 (26.7)	44 (17.3)	92 (36.1)	36 (14.1)	
Age (Adulthood status)	Early (under 45)	3 (0.8)	12 (3.2)	114 (30.1)	87 (23.0)	127 (33.5)	36 (9.5)	$\chi^2(10) = 29.79, p < .00$
	Middle(45-65)	21 (3.5)	36 (6.0)	172 (28.6)	100 (16.6)	184 (30.6)	89 (14.8)	
	Late (over 65)	9 (6.0)	6 (4.0)	36 (23.8)	24 (15.9)	51 (33.8)	25 (16.6)	
Education (degree)	Undergraduate	19 (3.0)	30 (4.7)	187 (29.5)	117 (18.5)	198 (31.2)	83 (13.1)	$\chi^2(5) = 0.57, p = .99$
	Graduate	14 (2.9)	23 (4.8)	133 (27.7)	90 (18.7)	158 (32.8)	63 (13.1)	

Table 7 (continued)

Income	Bracket 1	4 (5.9)	3 (4.4)	21 (30.9)	15 (22.1)	14 (20.6)	11 (16.2)	$\chi^2(10) = 21.73, p = .02$
	Bracket 2	9 (1.8)	19 (3.8)	123 (24.7)	92 (18.5)	184 (36.9)	71 (14.3)	
	Bracket 3	15 (2.9)	30 (5.8)	163 (31.7)	99 (19.3)	150 (29.2)	57 (11.1)	
Total		33 (2.9)	55 (4.8)	322 (28.4)	211 (18.6)	363 (32.0)	151 (13.3)	

Note. *Due to the low response rates of a diverse pool of alumni, ethnicity was not included in this study.

The Impact of the Receipt of Information on Giving Decisions and Hypothesis Four

The final question in the study was designed to explore whether the receipt of information had an impact on alumni giving. Research Hypothesis Four is: There is a difference in the impact of the receipt of information and alumni giving based on age, gender, ethnicity*, marital status, educational and income levels. The responses to survey items 3 through 10 and 18 were utilized in the data analysis to answer this question. The Chi-square Test of Independence results for Research Question Four did not show any significant relationships (see Table 8). Therefore, the research hypothesis in Question Four was rejected.

None of the demographic variables were related to giving decisions being influenced by the information received. Overall the results show that 39.9% (n= 455) of the respondents indicated that *sometimes* the information received affected their giving followed by 36.6% (n= 418) who indicated that the information received rarely affected their giving. . Table 8 illustrates the responses of alumni pertaining to the receipt of information and giving decisions.

Summary

The results of the responses to the survey have been presented in Chapter 4. Based on results of the data analysis, there was a significant association between age ($p < .00$) and the preferred solicitation method which was U.S. Mail (direct mail), followed by E-mail. Secondly, the Chi-Square Test of Independence found a significant association between age ($p < .00$) and the preferred communication method. Older alumni reported a higher preference for U.S. mail, compared to early and middle adulthood alumni.

There was also a significant association between gender ($p < .00$), age ($p < .00$), and income ($p = .02$) and the frequency of communication. Males preferred communication from the institution more frequently compared to females, older alumni (over 65), and those in Income

Table 8

Impact of Information Received Related to Giving Decisions by Selected Demographic Variables

		Does the information that you receive from Appalachian affect your decision to make a contribution?				Pearson Chi-Square
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often/All the Time	
Gender	Male (<i>n (%)</i>)	120 (18.5)	229 (35.2)	267 (41.1)	34 (5.2)	$\chi^2(3) = 1.77, p = .62$
	Female	84 (17.2)	188 (38.4)	188 (38.4)	29 (5.9)	
Marital Status (Relationship Status)	Married/Cohabiting	161 (18.4)	327 (37.3)	346 (39.5)	42 (4.8)	$\chi^2(3) = 4.91, p = .18$
	Single	43 (16.3)	90 (34.2)	109 (41.4)	21 (8.0)	
Age (Adulthood Stage)	Early	73 (19.2)	150 (39.4)	146 (38.3)	12 (3.1)	$\chi^2(6) = 12.55, p = .05$
	Middle	101 (16.7)	220 (36.4)	248 (41.0)	36 (6.0)	
	Late	30 (19.5)	48 (31.2)	61 (39.6)	15 (9.7)	
Education (degree)	Undergraduate	121 (19.0)	238 (37.3)	250 (39.2)	29 (4.5)	$\chi^2(3) = 3.63, p = .30$
	Graduate	80 (16.5)	176 (36.4)	195 (40.3)	33 (6.8)	
Income	Bracket 1	14 (19.4)	24 (33.3)	28 (38.9)	6 (8.3)	$\chi^2(6) = 6.95, p = .32$
	Bracket 2	100 (19.9)	181 (36.1)	197 (39.2)	24 (4.8)	
	Bracket 3	75 (14.6)	196 (38.1)	216 (42.0)	27 (5.3)	
Total		205 (18.0)	418 (36.6)	455 (39.9)	63 (5.5)	

Bracket 2 (\$40,000 to \$99,999) who all preferred to receive communication on a less frequent basis.

Finally, there was no significance related to the receipt of information and the impact of the alumni giving decisions.

The Chi-Square test of Independence did not show any significant relationships ($p = .05$). All of the research hypotheses except the hypothesis presented in Question Four were accepted. The purpose of this study was to identify alumni communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between several independent variables (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational and income levels) and to provide recommendations for future use.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter includes a brief discussion regarding the implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion.

Implications

The results of the current study support targeted communication and solicitations based on age, gender, income, and other characteristics of alumni donors. Alumni communication and giving preferences will vary by the type of institution and therefore, warrant continued analysis and research. In their analyses of the relationship between solicitation and donation, Gottfried and Johnson (2006) recommended additional research to examine solicitations and donations based on different variables. For example, if it is determined that different groups of alumni (e.g. based on race, age, and major) donate different amounts based on the preferred method of solicitation, colleges and universities can use the information to segment fundraising appeals more efficiently.

An examination of alumni communication and solicitation preferences by colleges or schools within a university such as schools of arts and sciences, law, allied health, business and education may offer additional insight. Pumerantz (2005) noted that, in general, alumni were more closely connected to their departments or programs rather than to the institution. Therefore, the creation of communication and solicitation tools by affinity group may improve alumni engagement and giving. A detailed analysis of preferences by college or school will also strengthen the major gift fundraising efforts of deans and advancement professionals in a specific college or school.

There is an obvious connection between the student experience, alumni involvement and giving. Therefore, engagement with students as “future alumni” should begin each academic year when the freshmen arrive on campus.

An “alumni-in-training” model (Pumerantz, 2005) can be incorporated into the student programming plan. This model should include multiple opportunities for interaction with the president or chancellor, discussions and readings regarding philanthropy, and a student service component. Images and testimonials of successful alumni could be incorporated into the student marketing materials. Specific messages can be crafted by major, school or college, organizational affiliation, and extracurricular activities.

If alumni giving is truly a priority the work begins with the students - colleges and universities must set the expectation by inviting student participation in the institution’s fundraising process. Students can strengthen the case for support through their interaction with alumni and other external constituents by sharing their experiences. If properly designed, managed and monitored, the intersection between students and alumni can become a powerful mechanism for sustaining the student-institutional relationship and alumni-institutional relationship, thereby increasing engagement and giving.

Researchers have proven that the quality of the relationships between students, faculty and staff affect future alumni engagement and giving. Since alumni represent the largest source of private funding, it is imperative for faculty, staff, and institutional leaders to create a climate that promotes positive student experiences.

Recommendations

Internal and external groups affiliated with institutions of higher education seek guidance from the president or chancellor regarding the vision and direction for building and sustaining alumni relationships.

The role of chancellors and presidents in creating a culture of continuous engagement with alumni cannot be overstated. If institutional leaders are seriously committed to increasing levels of private support they must also commit to a higher level of alumni engagement.

Since alumni will, undoubtedly, remain the largest and most important external constituency group, presidents and chancellors must place special emphasis on creating and sustaining positive relationships. In turn not only will alumni will support the institution with their time and resources, they will also become key advocates and “connectors” for the university. “The president must maintain constant communication with groups who influence the institution from a number of capacities” (Pumerantz, 20005, p. 338).

Secondly, the connection between the student experience and future alumni giving must not be ignored. University leaders must charge academic affairs, student development, and advancement professionals to work collaboratively to design programs that foster a culture of service and giving. For example, a course in philanthropy can be incorporated into the general education curriculum at colleges and universities. Finally, opportunities for service through community non-profits and through University Advancement can be created to educate students regarding the importance of philanthropy.

Pumerantz’s (2005) *Alumni-In-Training* model is based upon the premise that faculty and staff at colleges and universities should provide valuable and relevant educational experiences to students. In turn, the students will become successful and devoted alumni.

In their study, Sun, Hoffman and Grady (2007) utilized discriminant analysis to identify the important predictors of alumni giving. Not only were demographic variables such as graduation year and gender significant, but other factors were important including the student experience and student-faculty relationships. If alumni were satisfied with their student

experiences, they were more inclined to give. Future research specifically dedicated to determining whether there is a correlation between the alumna's or alumnus's experience as a student and giving patterns may be beneficial.

Conclusion

Understanding donor behavior and success with past solicitations can offer insight regarding donor preferences and priorities. Furthermore, an analysis of alumni communication and solicitation preferences will allow institutions of higher education to segment and streamline messages and appeals more efficiently.

Focused research will support the cultivation and fundraising efforts of presidents, chancellors, and advancement professionals in institutions where unique social, economic, and cultural dynamics are taken into consideration. For example, a study of alumni communication and solicitation preferences at historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) may present outcomes that differ from the results in the current study.

The notion of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) cannot be ignored – this is a tool that will enhance the alumni-university relationship. Continuous communication in a multi-channel context maximizes the use of information technology to enhance relationships. The 2007 study conducted by Convio and Strategic One verified that donor engagement through multiple communication channels had greater long term value, retention, and lifetime value compared to donor engagement through a single communication channel. There was an increase in the size of contributions when online donation and solicitation channels were added for donors who had been previously cultivated and solicited by direct mail. Concurrent direct mail and e-mail communication has been effective in enhancing alumni engagement and giving. The Rosemont College (Philadelphia) pilot study served as an example of increased response rates due to the

incorporation of e-mail, direct mail, and social media into a comprehensive alumni engagement plan (Caslon, 2010). The results from the Rosemont study also reiterated the importance of building alumni relationships prior to gift solicitations.

Profiles of the most likely alumni donors by college or university will support the creation and segmentation of publications and appeals in an efficient manner. Long term projections of the communication and solicitation preferences of alumni can guide the planning of university leaders and advancement professionals as they continue to build the base of financial support from alumni. The changing preferences for communication and solicitation also justify the need to utilize multiple communication and solicitation channels to adequately engage current and prospective alumni donors. In the future, longitudinal studies dedicated to monitoring the shifts and trends in communication and giving preferences by demographic variables may strengthen long-term strategies to increase alumni engagement and giving.

Eventually, alumni donor predictor models can be developed by colleges and universities based on demographics and their preferences for communication and solicitations.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: LaTanya Afolayan
CC: Sandra Seay
Date: 5/13/2012
Re: UMCIRB 12-000719
ALUMNI GIVING

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 5/13/2012. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category #2.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The UMCIRB office will hold your exemption application for a period of five years from the date of this letter. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit an Exemption Certification request at least 30 days before the end of the five year period. The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical)
IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS)
IORG0000418 IRB00004973
East Carolina U IRB #4 (Behavioral/SS Summer)
IORG0000418

Study.PI Name:

Study.Co-Investigators:

APPENDIX B: REVISED SURVEY

Alumni Communication and Solicitation Preferences

1. Thank you for your participation.

Consent to participate in a research study

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are an alumna or alumnus of Appalachian State University who has made a contribution in the past. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw your consent to participate in the study, for any reason, at any time.

Details regarding this study are outlined below. If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researchers named below.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn more about alumni communication and solicitation preferences. The questionnaire was designed to help researchers understand more about alumni attitudes regarding information and solicitations received from their alma mater. The survey consists of 29 questions and will take between 7-10 minutes to complete.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

You will be asked a series of questions regarding your preferred method for receiving information and solicitations from your alma mater. You will be asked to identify your preferred method for making charitable contributions to Appalachian State University. This questionnaire also contains a request for demographic information.

What are the benefits from being in this study?

There is no personal benefit to you by participating in this research study. However, the information collected may be used to help the university provide better alumni services to you in the future.

What are the possible risks or discomforts associated with this study?

There are no known risks or discomforts involved from being a part of this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

We will make every effort to protect your privacy. Your responses to the survey will remain anonymous – the researcher will not know who completes the survey and who does not, and respondents cannot be matched with completed surveys.

Will you receive anything from being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything participate in this study?

There is no cost associated with taking part in this study.

2. What if you are an Appalachian State University employee?

Taking part in this research is not a part of your University duties, and participating or refusing to participate will not affect your employment status. You will not be offered or receive any special job-related consideration if you take part in this research.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed below.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

IRB Study # UMCIRB – 12-00719

Principal Investigator: LaTanya D. Afolayan, College of Education, East Carolina University

Phone number: 919-257-8203

E-mail: Afolayanl06@students.ecu.edu

Faculty Advisor: Sandra Seay, Associate Professor

Phone number: 252- 328-5313

E-mail address: seays@ecu.edu

Participant’s Agreement:

I have read the information provided above and I have no questions at this time. By clicking on the NEXT button below, I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

NEXT>>

Demographic Information:

3. What is your gender?

Male Female

4. What is your ethnicity (please check one)?

Asian African African-American Caucasian Hispanic Native American

Other (please specify) _____

5. What is your age category?

under 25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66-75 76-85 over 86

6. What is your current marital status?

single married living with partner separated divorced widowed

7. What was your annual household annual income in 2011?

under \$20,000 \$20,000-\$39,999 \$40,000-\$69,000 \$70,000-\$99,000 over \$100,000

Education

8. Which degree(s) did you receive from Appalachian (check all that apply)?

attended but did not graduate Undergraduate Graduate Both degrees

9. What year(s) did you graduate from Appalachian? _____

10. What is the highest degree that you have earned from any institution?

Bachelor's (B.A., B.S., etc.)

Master's (M.A., MS., M.Ed., M.Div., etc.)

Doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)

Professional (J.D., M.D., Psy.D, etc.)

both doctoral and professional degrees

Other (specify) _____

Communication

11. How often do you check your e-mail messages each day?

___ less than once per day

___ 1-4 times per day

___ 5-10 times per day

___ constantly; I receive & read notifications throughout the day

12. How do you receive the majority of your e-mail messages?

___ on a computer

___ on a smart phone or similar device

___ on an I-Pad or similar device

___ other, please describe _____

13. In order of preference, rank the number of times you would like to receive news and information from Appalachian. Select only three (3) options, ranking **1** as your most preferred option, **2** as the second preference and **3** as the least preferred option.

___ None ___ Daily ___ Weekly ___ Bi-Monthly ___ Monthly ___ Quarterly

14. What type(s) of news and information are you most interested in receiving from your alma mater? Select only **3** types of news and information, ranking them from 1 to 3, with **1** as the most preferred type of information.

___ Alumni –related news

___ Campus events

___ Student activities

___ Athletic events

15. How do you prefer to receive news and information from Appalachian State University? Rank only **three** top options, ranking them from **1** to **3** with **1** as the most preferred method.

___ U.S. mail ___ Electronically (e-mail or text message)

___ by going directly to the Appalachian State University website

___ Facebook

Twitter

Other (please specify) _____

16. Do you feel that you have stronger ties to Appalachian State University because of the news and information that you receive through the Internet (e-mail, university website, etc.)?

Yes No N/A (I do not receive information from Appalachian –**There is a “skip logic” command in Qualtrics that takes respondents to question 19 if “N/A is selected as a response to question 16)**

17. When you receive information from Appalachian are you also asked to make a contribution?

Never Rarely Sometimes Every time N/A

18. Does the information that you receive from your alma mater affect your decision to make a contribution?

Never Rarely Sometimes Every time N/A

Requests for Contributions

19. How do you make the majority of your contributions to other charitable causes?

by mail

online

through an employee of the organization

at an event

other, please specify _____

20. How do you currently receive requests for contributions from Appalachian (check all that apply)?

U.S. mail Electronically (e-mail or text message)

Another source, please specify _____

n/a; I do not receive solicitations from Appalachian State University (If you do not receive solicitations from Appalachian please go to question 20.)

21. How do you prefer to receive requests for contributions from Appalachian State University (Select only **three** preferences with **1** as the most preferred method and **3** as the least preferred method.)?

___ mail

___ e-mail

___ text message

___ through a link on Appalachian's Facebook page

___ by phone

___ during a meeting with a staff member

___ from another source, please specify _____

22. How do you prefer to send contributions to your alma mater (Please select the **most** preferred method.)?

___ By mail

___ Online

___ I take my contributions to the gift processing office or the ASU Foundation office

___ I give my contributions to a university staff member

___ at a university event

___ Other (please specify) _____

23 On average, how many times per year are you asked to make a contribution to any area of Appalachian State University?

___ 0 ___ 1-3 times ___ 4-6 times ___ More than 6 times per year

24 How many times per year do you **prefer** to be asked to make a contribution to Appalachian State University?

___ 0 ___ 1 time ___ 2 times ___ 3 times ___ More than 4 times

25. Why motivates you to make contributions to Appalachian (Select only the top **four** reasons that you give to Appalachian with **1** as the most important reason and **4** as the least important reason for giving.)?

___ It is my duty to give back to the university

- I received scholarships when I was in college; now I want to help others
- A solicitation from a member of the university's faculty or staff
- A solicitation from a classmate or peer to support a specific initiative
- The joy and fulfillment of giving
- The income tax benefits
- The special privileges that I receive in exchange for my contributions (i.e. invitations to exclusive events, special seating, reserved parking)
- I realize that the university needs more private support
- Other comments _____

26. What is your average annual cumulative contribution to Appalachian?

- \$1-\$49 per year \$50-\$100 per year \$101-\$499 per year
- \$500-\$999 per year \$1000-\$4999 per year more than \$5000 per year

27. Have you ever made an online donation to Appalachian State University?

- Yes (If yes, skip question 28 and go to question 29 **(please note: "skip logic" command is activated here in Qualtrics and takes respondents to question 29 if "Yes" was selected)**)
- No (If no, go to question 28)

28. If you answered no to Question 27, would you ever consider making an online donation to Appalachian State University?

- Yes No

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

29. I enjoy receiving news about Appalachian State University via e-mail.

- Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

30. I feel comfortable making an online donation to Appalachian State University.

- Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

31. E-mail is an effective tool for maintaining ties to Appalachian State University.

___ Strongly agree ___ Agree ___ Neutral ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact LaTanya Afolayan, the principal investigator of this project at 919-257-8203 or afolayanl06@students.ecu.edu. You may also contact her faculty advisor Sandra Seay at 252-328-5313 or seays@ecu.edu.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM ASU



University Advancement
Office of Development
ASU Box 32007
Boone, NC 28608-2007
(828) 262-2090
Fax: (828) 262-2347

April 4, 2012

University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board
East Carolina University
2233 Old Cafeteria Building
Greenville, NC 27834

RE: IRB Study # UMCIRB – 12-00719

To the Institutional Review Board,

I am writing to confirm the Office of University Advancement's support of the research study, "Alumni Giving: An Examination of Communication and Solicitation Preferences at a Public University in North Carolina."

Ms. LaTanya Afolayan has been granted permission to distribute the research survey to the alumni of Appalachian State University. Please contact me at 828-262-4973 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Johnny D. Burleson".

Johnny D. Burleson
Associate Vice Chancellor

APPENDIX D: INVITATION LETTER TO ALUMNI



University Advancement
Office of the Vice Chancellor
ASU Box 32007
Boone, NC 28608-2007
(828) 262-2090
Fax: (828) 262-2347

May 15, 2012

Dear Appalachian Graduate:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a confidential survey focusing on alumni communication and solicitation preferences. You were randomly selected to participate because of your financial support to Appalachian State University.

This survey is part of a study which is being conducted by Ms. LaTanya Afolayan, a doctoral candidate in higher education. The study is designed to identify the preferred communication and solicitation channels among alumni donors.

You should receive the survey electronically within the next few days. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential. None of the questions can reveal your identity.

If you have any questions about this e-mail, please feel free to contact me at burlesonjd@appstate.edu. If you have questions regarding the survey and reporting methods, please contact LaTanya Afolayan at l_afolayan@yahoo.com or by phone at 919-257-8203.

Thank you for your participation. Your timely response is greatly appreciated.
Sincerely,

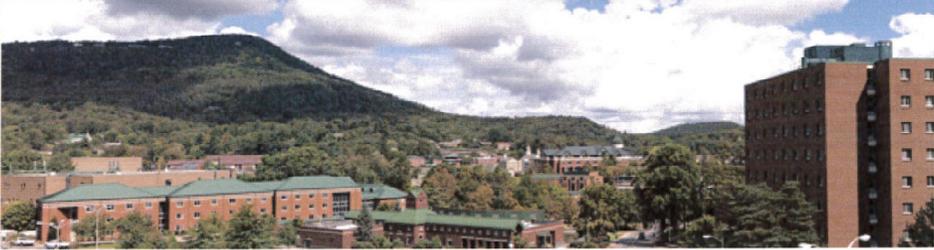
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny D. Burleson".

Johnny D. Burleson
Associate Vice Chancellor for University Advancement and Alumni Relations

JDB/clw

APPENDIX E: SURVEY LETTER AND LINK

alumni.appstate.edu  Like  Follow



May 23, 2012

Dear XXXXX:

You received a notice last week from Johnny Burleson, Associate Vice Chancellor for University Advancement, regarding a survey which is part of an alumni donor research study. The goal of this study is to gain deeper insight regarding the communication and solicitation preferences of alumni donors at Appalachian State University.

The link below will provide you with access to the survey. This survey consists of 29 questions; it will take approximately 7-10 minutes to answer the questions. We hope that you can complete this survey no later than Monday, May 28, 2012.

Survey link: https://ecu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_85PugTT1thJtxc0

If you have questions regarding the survey and reporting methods, please contact LaTanya Afolayan at l_afolayan@yahoo.com or by phone at 919-257-8203.

Thank you for your participation. Your timely response is greatly appreciated.

Equal Opportunity Policy | Unsubscribe 