

Spring 2014

Organizational Identification in Alumni Relations

Kristen L. Etzelmueller
Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/cps_professional

Recommended Citation

Etzelmueller, Kristen L., "Organizational Identification in Alumni Relations" (2014). *College of Professional Studies Professional Projects*. Paper 71.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION
IN ALUMNI RELATIONS

By

Kristen L. Etzelmueller, B. A.

A Professional Project submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Public Service,
Specialization in Leadership

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

March 2014

ABSTRACT
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION
IN ALUMNI RELATIONS

Kristen L. Etzelmueller, B. A.

Marquette University, 2014

An important aspect of higher education is alumni relations as universities develop a connection with former graduates. The ways alumni connect to their alma mater are represented through organizational identification. Organizational identification allows the alumni the opportunity to create a long lasting relationship with their alma mater. This relationship is beneficial to alumni relations departments at collegiate institutions as they strive to understand methods to keep alumni connected philanthropically, serving in volunteer roles, as well as mentoring and recruiting prospective students. All of these areas are important to the institution in an effort to maintain and strengthen the institution's status. This qualitative, exploratory study utilizes face-to-face interviews with alumni of various accredited institutions to clarify the importance of this connection as well as to provide input from alumni. The results of the study suggest that organizational identification may benefit both alumni relations professionals and former students, alumni are more likely to volunteer or donate based on a personal connection to the university, and the academic and social experience as an undergraduate student has a significant impact on alumni involvement and philanthropy.

Keywords: organizational identification, alumni relations, alma mater, philanthropy, volunteer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kristen L. Etzelmueller, B. A.

I would like to offer my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my family, friends, colleagues, fellow classmates, as well as the faculty and staff of the College of Professional Studies for their support. This experience has enriched my life both personally and professionally. My advisor, Professor Leslee Ruscitti, has provided impressionable advice and guidance through this process. The knowledge I have acquired will provide a dimension of expertise throughout my journey in leadership and service roles. I am truly honored to have had the experience to conduct research interviews with a variety of proud alumni from diverse institutions. The interviewees provided valuable insight that offered rich detail about the alumni experiences that shaped this research study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	iv
CHAPTER	
I. ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN ALUMNI RELATIONS	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	
Definition of Organizational Identification	3
Volunteerism and Political Advocacy	5
Academic and Social Engagement	8
Alumni Giving	10
Active Communication with Alumni.....	15
Alumni and Athletic Programs	17
Financial Aid and Alumni Support.....	21
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	23
IV. FINDINGS	
Perception of Organizational Identification	25
Academic and Social Collegiate Experience	27
Alumni Demographic Information	31
Alumni Volunteers and Political Advocates.....	34
Athletic Programs	38
Alumni Donations.....	40
Financial Assistance and Alumni.....	42

Alma Mater Reputation.....	45
Prospective Students	46
VI. DISCUSSION	
Developing a Connection.....	48
Maintaining a Connection.....	49
Athletics and Alumni	49
Alumni Giving	50
Future Implications	51
V. CONCLUSION	
Research Limitations	54
Future Research	55
Concluding Remarks.....	57
VI. REFERENCES	59
VII. APPENDICES	
Appendix A: IRB Exempt Letter	63
Appendix B: Agreement of Consent for Research Participants	64
Appendix C: Interview Questions	66

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Categories of Volunteers and Their Characteristics	11
Table 2: Variables for Giving Patterns of Alumni	14
Table 3: Variables for Giving Patterns of Alumni	20
Table 4: Participant Feedback on the Understanding of Organization Identification and its Relationship to Alumni Relations.....	26
Table 5: Participant Perception of Academic Experience as an Undergraduate.....	29
Table 6: Participant Perception of Social Experience as an Undergraduate.....	30
Table 7: Participant Personal Information Current with Alma Mater.....	33
Table 8: Participation Role as an Alumnus to the Alma Mater	36
Table 9: Participant Support of Alma Mater Athletic Programs.....	39
Table 10: Participation in Donations to Alma Mater	41
Table 11: Participant Financial Support as an Undergraduate.....	44
Table 12: Participant Perception of Alma Mater	46
Table 13: Prospective Students	47

Organizational Identification in Alumni Relations

Alumni relations are a significant aspect of the post academia experience and offer universities the opportunity to connect with former students in order to establish a long-term relationship. Universities rely on their graduates to support the higher education institution and to provide financial assistance to students. Research studies also indicate that universities should encourage alumni to fill roles as volunteers. These volunteers promote the institution's reputation to the community as well as to prospective students, which creates organizational identification. Organizational identification is a form of social identification, whereby a person comes to view himself or herself as a member of the organization, also known as the social entity (Boros, 2008). University advancement departments allow alumni relations professionals to use the concept of organizational identification to connect alumni with their alma maters. The goal is to maintain this connection long-term, extending years after the students' graduation.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the driving forces of organizational identification within alumni relations and to determine the reasons alumni continue their involvement with their alma maters and to what extent. This exploratory, inductive study examines themes as well as a topic of interest with future research opportunities. Through the review of research studies as well as a qualitative research method of face-to-face interviews, this study offers the perspective of how organizational identification can benefit alumni relations professionals. Common themes emerge from the interviews, which coincide with the literature review regarding the alumni collegiate experience, philanthropy, communication methods, and the impact of athletic programs on the alumni connection. Various opportunities of involvement from an institution's alumni are important, but the goal of university advancement should include forming an ongoing, long-term connection and relationship between the former student and the

university. The opportunity to connect alumni as long-time supporters and advocates for the college or university is the future of higher education.

Literature Review

A report by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) indicates that institutions of higher education, both private and public, sought out private giving to meet financial needs for academics, programming, administration, as well as financial aid for students (Drezner, 2011). As external support of higher education decreases and costs for students rise, the need for alumni support significantly increases (Drezner, 2011). Given the recent economic crisis, this observation is essential for the future of higher education. Personal wealth has disappeared from institutional endowments due to the financial downturn, which has negatively affected higher education support. The Voluntary Support of Education Survey from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) found for 2009, \$27.85 billion was given to colleges from a variety of funding sources. Of that amount, \$7.13 billion (25.6%) was donated by alumni, and an additional \$5 billion (17.9 %) came from non-alumni (Masterson, 2010, p. 1). Individuals accounted for 43.5% of giving to higher education. As the economic downturn occurred, the need for support of higher education became increasingly apparent. The ASHE Higher Education Report acknowledges the effect of economic hardships on higher education but at the same time recognizes how important alumni are in providing support to their alma mater (Drezner, 2011).

The importance of former student support to their alma mater is relevant research, which offers various interpretations demonstrating how organizational identification can enhance the field of alumni relations. Common themes come to the forefront in an attempt to explain how

graduates' connections with their alma maters can offer multiple benefits to the university. These themes include: a) volunteer and political advocacy opportunities with the university, b) financial giving patterns of former students, c) how the success and influence of athletic programs affect the alumni connection to their alma mater, d) how financial aid provides a benefit to the undergraduate, and d) how it now affects their giving pattern.

Several research studies provide insight into how organizational identification can fit into the field of advancement, which includes alumni support. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) describes the field of advancement “as a strategic, integrated method of managing relationships to increase understanding and support among an educational institution's key constituents, including alumni and friends, government policy makers, the media, members of the community and philanthropic entities of all types” (Masterson, 2013, p. 1). CASE maintains that advancement professionals work on behalf of educational institutions in order to solicit private financial support from potential donors committed to the mission of the institution, engage alumni in the institution, promote the university to prospective students as well as communicate about the institution with those who have a stake in its success (Mitchell, 2013). The donors who identify with the institution will be more likely to give back to their universities. Several researchers' studies address organizational identification in their research. Organizational identification is the connection between alumni and their alma maters creating a relationship, which can enhance university advancement.

Definition of Organizational Identification

Mael and Ashforth (1992) refer to organizational identification as a perceived oneness with an association, which is based on how an individual experiences the successes and failures of the social entity. The study provides examples of how organizational identification can benefit

the connection of graduates to their alma mater. The study offers opportunities for universities to promote their objectives and increase visibility by

- recruiting prominent faculty members,
- publicizing the accomplishments of alumni,
- recognizing the success rates of sports teams,
- maintaining high admission standards, and
- keeping with college traditions (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

The researchers take into consideration what keeps alumni connected to the university on a long-term basis. The study indicates that a member who is identifying with the institution may experience some psychological loss if he/she left the group. To understand the essential components of university advancement, one must address how a positive relationship with former students establishes a successful future for the university.

Other researchers define organizational identification as a relationship in which there is a specific connection within a formal group (Bartels, Pruyn, DeJong, & Joustra, 2007). Jones and Volpe (2010) determined that alumni, through organizational identification, could generate a relationship that produces financial contributions and establishes the potential to provide information to future students about the institution. Organizational identification indicates opportunities to establish a long-term association, which can be a decisive connection for graduates toward their alma mater. University advancement professionals must consider the options of how to engage former students into a relationship, which extends to fundraising support, and how the alumni can represent the institution. As colleges and universities strive to expand the institution-alumni relationship, they need to work toward the goal of familiarizing

themselves with how the concept of organizational identification fits into a vital objective of an institution. The main objective is to maintain involvement with the former university students.

Volunteerism and Political Advocacy

Weerts, Cabrera, and Sanford (2010) discuss the importance of graduates' behavior patterns of involvement with their alma mater. A goal of university advancement should be to define the philanthropic, volunteer, and political advocacy roles for alumni and to determine how the alumni can serve a greater purpose to the institution. Alumni can provide a higher profile to the community as well as to future students and are essential to the growth of a university. The researchers examine the characteristics of alumni who are most likely to engage in various support behaviors. The role of a volunteer or political advocate offers an opportunity for the graduate to form a strong connection. These support behaviors may include the following options:

- contacting political leaders, local officials, or the Governor's office on behalf of the institution,
- recruiting and mentoring potential students,
- hosting or volunteering at a local alumni event, and
- mentoring new alumni through networking (Weerts et al., 2010).

The purpose of the study was to document the range as well as the common alumni support behaviors, beyond charitable giving, that graduates exhibit toward their alma mater and to examine if these support behaviors can be grouped together to develop a theme. According to Weerts et al. (2010), of the 2,400 alumni surveyed, 1,441 of the former students responded (60% response rate). These researchers limit the parameters of the analysis to 514 alumni in order to examine behaviors of a small but highly committed group of former students who support their

alma mater. The alumni report that their main objective is to engage in service-oriented behaviors. The support behaviors were grouped into two areas: volunteerism and political advocacy. Within these two categories, contacting legislators (political advocacy) and recruiting potential students (volunteerism) yielded the highest percentages of involvement. Even with a small proportion of college graduates exhibiting these support behaviors, the research offers some insight into how university advancement could implement organizational identification to provide a stronger connection with alumni.

Through the organizational identification concept, institutional professionals can recruit and utilize alumni in a role to establish a connection for the long-term. Weerts et al. (2010) discuss the organizational identification and alumni correlation utilizing three social science theories: social exchange, expectancy, and investment. These theories are used as research tools to identify how organizational identification can represent the reason individuals may focus on their post-graduate involvement with their alma mater. For the purpose of this study, the theories define the correlation and influence of organizational identification within alumni relations departments. Social exchange theory refers to the decision former students make to contribute to the school based on their level of received benefit, education, career options, and prestige. Expectancy theory defines how the university graduates feel they can make a difference. The investment theory is defined as creating the balance of rewards and costs between the graduates and their alma mater. Results of the study by Weerts et al. (2010) indicate former students could become involved with their alma mater based on a positive impression of the institution, their belief that their service will make a difference, and the desire to make a connection to the university on a long-term basis. The survey results reveal accounts of serving as political advocates who lobby for legislative and gubernatorial support on behalf of the university.

One potential outcome is learning how colleges and universities can direct their efforts to build quality relationships with their graduates (Gaier, 2005). The topic of alumni giving has distinct benefits to a university. Advancement professionals need to emphasize the importance of graduates having the potential to increase philanthropic giving to the institution and the importance of the university's profile (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The research indicates that the institution can expand its influence to others outside of the college. Weerts and Ronca (2008) examine how advancement professionals can encourage alumni, who demonstrate a charitable commitment to the institution, to expand their roles into long-term volunteers or political advocates. They suggest that graduates of an institution, who are already donors, may progress into a volunteer, because they are already service-oriented and civically engaged. The research question guiding Weerts and Ronca's (2008) study is "What are the characteristics of alumni donors who are likely to become institutional advocates and volunteers" (p. 276)? The study contributes to the body of research to understand overall alumni support for a university beyond charitable giving. The analysis does indicate some reasons former students may not hold a strong connection to the university including physical distance as well as uncertain economic times, in which alumni may view their personal financial status differently.

In a similar study by Weerts and Ronca (2007), they attempt to explain why a relationship should be sustained during the many demographic changes in the lives of graduates. When university advancement departments encourage participation, alumni are able to be a valuable resource, not only philanthropically but also within the university's community (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The researchers conclude that a fundraising campaign is likely to be most effective if there is active contact with former students on a continuous basis. One option from

the study indicates that a university advancement department could conduct an alumni consensus to create a portfolio of alumni donors who are also likely to volunteer with the institution.

Academic and Social Engagement

Researchers expand upon the experiences of former undergraduate students and the effect their academic and social experiences have on their roles as alumni. Overall involvement within the institution's academic and social experiences, characteristics of the association, and characteristics of former students have the potential to create a positive influence on membership to an alumni association (Newman & Petrosko, 2011). The researchers studied graduates of a large, public university in southern United States with over 19,000 undergraduates. E-mail and direct mail surveys were distributed resulting in 7,535 participants (39.7% response rate). The survey inquired about the former student's participation in university-related events, experiences as an undergraduate student, quality of the institution, as well as the perceptions of the value of joining the university's alumni association. Alumni association professionals may find it beneficial to distinguish the psychological factors pertaining to alumni experiences that are essential to connect with the university long-term. The study found that graduates were more likely to be alumni association members if they were current donors, had a telephone number on record, were relatively older in age, had positive experiences as alumni, had an affirmative perception of the alumni membership association, were frequently involved with the alma mater, and were aware of other alumni association members.

Newman and Petrosko's (2011) research can assist university advancement departments to build life-long relationships with former students of the institution, to maintain communication between the graduates and the university, to enhance the alumni voice on behalf of the college, as well as to maintain history and tradition. The two variables, with statistical

significance to affect positively alumni association memberships, are graduates who were aware of other alumni association members' involvement and former students who spent a greater amount of time on campus. Graduates, who were aware of other alumni membership involvement, were 2.45 times more likely to be alumni association members themselves.

Additionally, former students who spent a significant amount of time in their collegiate career on campus developed a closer connection than those students who did not. Newman and Petrosko (2011) suggest the results may motivate advancement representatives to update databases, which can track demographic and attitudinal measures to understand the motivation of their alumni.

Davidson-Shivers, Inpornjivit, and Sellers (2004) suggest the use of databases to track program evaluation and planning. They explored the use of datasheets and surveys to learn about student and alumni satisfaction and their perceptions of their education. The literature indicates that a university advancement department does not always have the most complete or current information on its former students due to antiquated data systems and lack of resources. They note that without proper updates the details are only point-in-time statistics that neglect certain benchmarks of longitudinal data in order to implement organizational identification.

In a related study, Gaier (2005) indicates that graduates may leave their college or university with certain sentimentalities of their experience, which could play into a greater role for alumni. One of these variables is the academic system variable defined as "overall level of satisfaction with the undergraduate academic experience" (Gaier, 2005, p. 284). This important variable further explains the relationship between alumni and their collegiate involvement. The undergraduate academic experience may influence the organization identification level of the alumni toward their alma mater. Gaier (2005) hypothesized the higher the level of academic satisfaction the more likely it is for alumni to continue their involvement with the university. The

alumni recruited from a large U.S. state university numbered 3,397 alumni, which resulted in participation of 1,608 (47.3% response rate). Participants completed an online survey regarding satisfaction of the academic system, their demographics, experience in social activities, as well as current alumni involvement. The results of the study demonstrated a positive relationship between their academic satisfaction level and their alumni involvement. The probability of becoming involved with the university due to high academic satisfaction was 67%. Gaier (2005) indicates university officials need to implement practices, which will lead to satisfaction with the academic system in order to increase the likelihood of future involvement. To provide the best collegiate experience does not solely fall on the advancement department but is a university-wide objective.

Alumni Giving

Several researchers studied the affect the reputation of the college can have on future and former students as it relates to supporting their alma mater. Sung and Yang (2009) developed a three-step procedure to gain a deeper insight into the relationship and communication within the university. They note four factors that influence the behavioral intentions of alumni involvement with their alma mater, which include:

1. students' communication behavior with the university,
2. perceived quality of educational experience,
3. evaluations of the relationship with the university, and
4. university reputation with a positive image (Sung & Yang, 2009).

The researchers found the relationship that former students have with the university along with the reputation of the institution develop strong determinants of supportive behavioral intentions

(the intention of involvement). These behavioral intentions include charitable giving, continuing education, and referring potential students to the university.

The study explores the effect of future giving based on the relationship between the former students and the alma mater. The research questions inquire whether graduates are more likely to donate to their alma mater if they have a better relationship with the university, if the college is perceived to have a good reputation, and/or if current experiences affect the graduates' decisions to support the institution. Sung and Yang (2009) explain that the greater the level of communication between the university and the students the higher the likelihood of a quality relationship and favorable opinion of their alma mater. Former students' willingness to support their alma mater depends on their satisfaction and their perception of the education quality, the reputation of the institution, as well as continuous communication with the university. Research results indicate opportunities to establish long-term giving by alumni are the result of establishing good relational outcomes based on active communication and satisfaction with their collegiate experience.

In a related study, Weerts and Ronca (2007) review the capacity to give and volunteer versus the inclination to give and volunteer, which is estimated by the value of the former students' current and past experiences with the institution. The researchers identify four categories of volunteering based on the characteristics of involvement with the university (see Table 1). The four categories are inactive, volunteer, donor, and supporter. The data analysis was collected from an alumni survey conducted at a research-extensive university (REU) and is referenced throughout this study.

Table 1

Categories of Volunteers and Their Characteristics

Category of Volunteers	Characteristics
Inactive	No record of giving or volunteering at the alma mater.
Volunteer	<p>Supports the institution through one or more service roles.</p> <p>Serves in one or more of the following capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club officer/volunteer for local/national chapter of REU alumni association • Mentor new REU alumni (e.g., REU career volunteer program) • Contact legislator/Governor's office on behalf of REU (e.g., member of REU political action network)
Donor	<p>Supports the university through charitable donations but does not volunteer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made a charitable gift to REU (cash, stock, land, real estate, other) • Made a charitable gift to REU (cash, stock, land, real estate, other)
Supporter	<p>Supports the university through donations and service role(s).</p> <p>Serves in one or more of the capacities listed in Volunteer.</p>

Weerts and Ronca's (2007) study examines the four volunteer categories using the theories of social exchange, expectancy, and investment. Expectancy theory, in this context, analyzes if the graduate feels they can make a difference, which emerged as the strongest inclination. The alumni in the supporter category were 9.28 times more likely to donate based on their belief that the alumni should support their alma mater and that the institution needs their support. Former students in the donor category were 2.88 times more likely to contribute to the fundraising campaign of their alma mater. Advancement departments should review the way attitudes toward giving are formed. In addition, they should determine if these values are cultivated at the university or from an outside source.

Tsao and Coll's (2005) study used a four-page questionnaire, which was mailed to the participants along with a postage-paid envelope and was posted online. The purpose of their research was to study the intention of former students to make a donation. The researchers focused on demographic variables, psychographic profiles (satisfaction with a program), as well as behavioral traits (communication and involvement) with the institution's educational program. The results of this study indicate the more positive the student experience is during the academic program the more the individual will want to contribute after graduation. The researchers found that alumni giving patterns accounted for one-fourth of the support to higher education. The study indicates that although the Council for Aid to Education reveals "alumni giving in 2002 dropped by 14%," it still represented a significant resource for higher education (Tsao & Coll, 2005, p. 381). The researchers stipulate that institutions should recognize the alumni donor's personality, social status, mood, knowledge, ability, resources, and previous experience with the institution when it comes to former student involvement. Tsao and Coll (2005) sent surveys to 1,600 journalism alumni of a four-year public university. Returns of the survey resulted in 286 responses (18% return rate). The results point to three major factors, quality of communication with the graduates, alumni satisfaction with the journalism academic program, as well as personal income, which can contribute to the intent to make a donation. Satisfaction with the communication from the university and the educational program are internal factors while personal income is an external factor. The research reveals that although the quality of the collegiate program is important to the connection, there is also a need for an alumni-relations strategy to influence involvement.

Terry and Macy (2007) focus their study on fundraising efforts at universities and colleges as a top priority for advancement administrators due to declining government support.

They indicate that in order to meet strategic goals, such as higher enrollment, a positive reputation, and successful athletic programs, the university systems need to compete for top students, faculty, and research grants. The purpose of their research is to analyze the giving patterns of graduates based on financial, institutional, and demographic variables (see Table 2).

Table 2

Variables for Giving Patterns of Alumni

Category	Variables
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVDEBT (average debt) • PPGRANTS (Pell grants - need based federal grants) • TUITION FEES (tuition fees) • ROOMBOARD (room and board)
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIZE (size of the institution) • PUBLIC (a public university) • ENDOWMENT (extent of a donation) • LARGECLASS (class size) • ACCEPT (acceptance rate of applicants)
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FULLTIME (full-time student) • FEMALE (female students) • AFAMERICAN (African American students) • HISPANIC (Hispanic student)

Of all the variables, FULLTIME (full-time student status) and FEMALE (female students) were found statistically significant on whether or not the alumni contribute to their alma mater. Full-time students have the opportunity to participate in the complete collegiate experience and graduate with a positive opinion of the school. The researchers found a greater probability of a positive response in charitable giving. The analysis of the data reveals that many of the institutions with a 98% or higher full-time student population have a higher level of alumni giving. The FEMALE variable produced a significant but negative result. The researchers

specify this negative response could be due to the female graduates' interest in contributing to other charitable causes rather than to their alma mater. The results offer an opportunity for university advancement professionals to focus their efforts on the variables that did not produce significant statistics or created a negative result. The outcomes of the study show the necessity of institutions to instill a culture of giving in their current students and alumni. An important objective for university advancement is to emphasize to alumni the rising costs of running the institution, the need for student financial aid, and the role they can play in the future.

Active Communication with Alumni

A study by Levine (2008) uses surveys to analyze the use of communication methods to examine the correlation between the university and the alumni giving patterns. The researcher indicates that alumni magazines, appeal letters, and electronic alumni newsletters are critical for a university to inform its alumni about goals, activities, and offerings. Communication offers the potential to motivate former students to take a long-term interest in the university. Alumni need to be kept informed if they are to remain active with their alma mater. The objective of the study was to receive feedback from institutions regarding the correlation between the various types and the frequency of communication pieces that the university sends to solicit alumni giving. There has been separate research on alumni giving and communication methods, but the Levine study was designed to interpret the effects of communication vehicles on alumni giving, including communication frequency, format, and content. The research points toward the importance of communication with former students in order to maintain and enhance the relationship with this essential constituency.

Publications need to serve both the interests of the current student population as well as engage the graduates in the fundraising purposes of the institution. The research design examines four points:

1. if the level of communication exhibits an affirmative relationship to alumni dollars raised,
2. if the degree of communication exhibits a positive relationship with former students,
3. if the level of communication exhibits a favorable outcome regarding the size of alumni donations, and
4. if certain communication pieces produce a superior effect on giving than others.

(Levine, 2008)

The study was conducted using a questionnaire mailed to 250 private university annual giving and development directors. The institutions were members of CASE with a student population of 1,500 to 15,000. The return rates were highest from the East Coast universities (45%) and the lowest were from the West Coast institutions (14%). The survey asked about the general annual giving patterns of their graduates as well as the yearly campaign responses. Results provided insight into the four points tested for generalized themes. Overall, the number of pieces of correspondence sent to former students was not positively correlated with alumni giving levels or participation. The researcher saw a favorable correlation between the frequency of communication and alumni giving and participation. The regularity of appeal letters sent resulted in greater giving levels and higher participation rates. The study revealed the main results were not a correlation between the number of pieces sent to alumni but rather the type, i.e., newsletter, annual report, as well as the frequency of the pieces. Levine (2008) concluded that the frequency and type of communication piece was of greatest interest to the alumni when

considering giving and involvement. When advancement offices reflect on their communication methods with former students, it is important to evaluate the types of pieces sent as well as maintain a consistent and productive frequency to yield interest and fundraising support. This connection is another element of organizational identification allowing the graduates of the institution a balance of knowledge and request for financial support.

Alumni and Athletic Programs

Athletic programs may hold a significant connection for alumni, which may enhance the organizational identification towards their alma mater. Various research studies have attempted to determine if the success rate of an institution's athletic program generates a greater connection for alumni. A substantial portion of the fan base, which contributes support to the athletic programs, may provide a substantial impact on the financial bottom line for the institution. Athletic involvements, the success rate of the athletic program, personal connection to the teams, and the type of athletic programs are an important focus for the alumni–alma mater relationship (Meer & Rosen, 2009). The researchers demonstrate the impact of athletic performance on annual giving by studying male versus female sports programs, the major sports programs of the institution (basketball and football), if the alumni were former players, as well as the institution's winning record.

The research study concentrated on if winning teams encourage alumni to make more donations and if the donations support the overall university or specifically the athletic program. Popular athletic programs, such as basketball and football, have been studied, but the researchers indicate that while they may produce a connection to the institution, they may not necessarily yield higher donations. Sports programs for former students could have provided a major component of the undergraduate collegiate experience. Therefore, the organizational

identification of the alumni to their alma mater offers a potential opportunity to remain connected long-term after graduation. The analysis considers if in a given year, athletic performance influences the amount of money that alumni donate for general purposes as well as to the athletic programs. One major finding is that the performance of undergraduate male team members has a substantial effect on the alumni giving towards the athletic program. In contrast, the success of female athletes neither affects her giving for general purposes or the athletic program. The variables analyzed include the overall team record, the football team's record, the basketball team's record, as well as the academic year of the team member during a conference win. The results indicated the performance of the team during the alumni members' undergraduate years and if there were a conference win during their senior year have a substantial effect on the amount of subsequent giving to the athletic program.

In a related study by Stinson and Howard (2008), the researchers examine the allocation patterns of actual gift amounts restricted to the athletic program or a general gift to the university (Athletic Gift/Total Gift). This analysis was intended to demonstrate whether there is a shift in overall university donor support, particularly as academic and athletic gifts increase. A large portion of the research examining the influence of athletic programs on private giving patterns has been conducted using only data from Division I-A (NCAA Division I) schools. Division I is the highest level of a sports team in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

The primary purpose of the study by Stinson and Howard (2008) was to determine if similar trends in private giving occur at Division I-AA (NCAA Division II) and Division I-AAA (NCAA Division III) universities. The annual giving data from 1998 through 2003 was analyzed for schools competing at the Division I-AA and Division I-AAA level. Average gift size was the dependent variable to reflect the influence of athletic success on individual donors. The findings

appear to sustain both financial support of athletic and academic programs based on the success of the athletic teams. Average institutional giving indicates increases in total donor support and institutional investments may be enhanced by developing successful, high profile sports at even the lower levels of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) competition. The quantity of gifts to the university by former students as well as the average gift size donated were essential factors to consider. The research indicates that increased athletic success leads to an increased level of academic and athletic support.

Research conducted by Martinez, Stinson, Kang, and Jubenville (2010) summarize their study results regarding intercollegiate athletics and institutional fundraising, which is outlined in Table 3. The purpose of this study is to perform a meta-analytic review of the scholarly research articles on the relationship between intercollegiate athletic success and institutional giving. A meta-analysis is a structured research method that encompasses a formal review of previous empirical studies based on observation rather than theory. This type of research allows for the development of various findings from multiple studies and identifies common themes to provide recommendations for future research. The final sample analysis in this study consisted of all available empirical studies conducted from 1975 through 2008. The analysis provides an explanation of the circumstances in which intercollegiate sports are more likely to have the strongest influence on institutional giving. The study specifically identified variables of giving, which included if a donation was restricted to athletics, academics, or general university; the alumni status of the donor; NCAA classification of the athletic programs; as well as the sport of interest to the former student. The significant meta-analysis findings are essential to understanding the effects of athletic programs on organizational fundraising. Even with limitations within the study, the researchers reported with confidence that intercollegiate athletic

programs do have a strong influence on institutional giving through the influence of the four identified variables.

Table 3

Study Results of Intercollegiate Athletics and Institutional Fundraising

	Results
Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across 30 years of empirical study, intercollegiate athletics has a small, but significant influence on institutional fundraising. • Effects of athletic success are strongest when institutional giving is considered. • Alumni donors are more influenced by athletic success than non-alumni donors are. • Football is the primary influence on giving at institutions where football is played. • Public institutions and private schools have nearly identical effect sizes, indicating all schools may be influenced by athletic performance.
Implications for Practice	<p>Institutional fundraisers should invest in understanding the role athletics play in giving and learn to leverage athletic success to benefit institutional fundraising efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic success may be a positive influence on both athletic and academic fundraising. • Academic fundraisers should consider the ability of athletic programs to assist in donor development. • Contrary to some popular press, alumni should be targeted with campaigns leveraging the role of athletics in fundraising. In particular, successful athletic programs appear to bring more alumni donors to the institution. Care should be taken to successfully develop and cultivate these new donors. • Fundraisers should pay particular attention to the football team. Positive shaping of expectations and perceptions of success may enhance institutional fundraising. • Both public and private schools appear influenced; and therefore, may leverage athletic success in fundraising.

Holmes, Meditz, and Sommers (2008) contribute to the research by analyzing more than 22,000 alumni from an elite, liberal arts, I-AAA (NCAA Division III) institution. The data was

based on alumni annual giving between 1990 and 2004. The researchers collected information on the winning statistics of the highest profiled sports of the university, hockey and football. One hypothesis is that a winning season in a popular university sport generates higher publicity for the institution. This publicity then leads to a heightened sense of school spirit and the potential of an increase in donations from the graduates of the university. The results from this study indicate the possibility that former athletes were more likely to contribute to their alma mater than their non-participating counterparts were. The evidence did suggest alumni who were former members of winning teams would respond more favorably to fundraising appeals.

The literature on athletic programs and their influence on alumni donations are quite impactful. The research offers insight to university advancement on how to implement organizational identification through team support to connect with their alumni. Options from this connection leverage donor support based on marketing the experience with the university's athletic programs and the success rate.

Financial Aid and Alumni Support

The athletic programs of an institution offer a way for former students to identify with their alma mater. There may also be an economic link between the institution and former students, which could provide a connection once the student graduates. Meer and Rosen (2012) analyze the relationship between students receiving financial aid packages as undergraduates and their donation behavior as alumni. In many aspects, financial aid is essential to provide students the opportunity to attend higher education. The researchers examined data on alumni giving and focused on three types of financial aid scholarships, loans, and campus jobs. Institutional grant dollars per full-time undergraduates increased at an average annual rate of 2.8% over the 1999 to 2010 decade. According to the Council for Aid to Education (2011), higher education institutions

have become more reliant on support from alumni contributions (Meer & Rosen, 2012). The researchers analyze one potential link between the two trends: the possibility that alumni donation behavior is directly affected due to the receipt of financial support as undergraduates. This attitude may be consistent with those that feel fortunate to have received financial aid, and as alumni, they may want to provide the same advantage to other students. Data was analyzed using administrative archives at a university of all individuals who graduated between 1993 and 2005. The researchers began examining 14,382 alumni records. From the initial data source, 5,175 names were deleted due to missing or unreliable data leaving 13,831 former students to study. Of the individuals incorporated in the sample, 49.6% of the individuals received a form of financial aid (scholarships, loans, or campus jobs). The breakdown of this percentage included 44.7% receiving a portion of scholarship aid, 40.4% receiving aid through a campus job, and 43% receiving loans.

The data report on the study indicates a negative probability of a former student receiving financial support and making a charitable donation. Meer and Rosen (2012) indicate that the receipt of student loans or holding of campus jobs during college may negatively affect the probability of graduates making a donation due to their income status. Some students may come from a relatively low-income family; and therefore, they do not have the means or connections to offer a donation even after graduation. Other students deal with the burden of financial debt, and as a result, the alumni feel they are unable to donate money. Another possibility addressed in the study is that those students who received loans or held a campus job may have felt excluded from the collegiate culture. These theories tie into the concept of organizational identification relating to how the graduate may or may not connect to their alma mater. Results from the study show scholarship aid reduces the amount of alumni giving but has little effect on the probability

of giving. In fact, some larger grants issued to scholarship recipients did in turn offer a larger donation to their alma mater. The manner in which alumni are affected by the financial aid packages they received offers the opportunity for a unique study and a possible prediction of donations in the future. Based on the findings, the researchers advise that universities should not rely on substantial contributions from those that received financial aid.

Research Methodology

This exploratory study used a qualitative research method of face-to-face interviews of alumni through a set of 10 open-ended questions to analyze themes. Social science exploratory research is a broad-range, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations (Stebbins, 2001). The design of exploratory research is to lead to a description and understanding within an area of social or psychological life (Stebbins, 2001). The Marquette University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted exempt status on this research study on May 23, 2013 (see Appendix A). At the time of the interview, each participant received an Agreement of Consent for Research Participants (Appendix B) form to obtain informed consent. The consent form also presented the risks associated with participation in the study, which were minimal.

The objective of the study is to determine if alumni continue their involvement with their alma mater, to what extent and for what reasons. The prospective participants were Marquette University employees representing random undergraduate universities. The researcher contacted the prospective participants via e-mail to coordinate face-to-face interviews or to complete a questionnaire. Fourteen alumni agreed to participate in this research study. All participants chose the face-to-face 30-45 minute interview process. The recruited former undergraduates

represented a variety of graduation years spanning a 30-year range. All participants were graduates of accredited undergraduate universities, representing both public and private institutions. Seven women and seven men participated in face-to-face interviews. The researcher coded the participants' names in a number sequence, P1-P14, based on their position in the discussion process. All participants chose their place of employment as the interview location. The dialogues were recorded digitally with permission of the participants. The interviews included 10 open-ended questions (Appendix C) and transcribed nearly verbatim to develop pattern themes. The data sheet and the audio recordings were labeled in reference to the participant with a numerical code rather than by name. Once the interview results were analyzed, the results were stored in a secure location and were saved without identifying information.

This research is an exploratory, inductive study and does not include a hypothesis. The data was analyzed to develop themes from the findings in order to provide recommendations for future research. The literature review and research data may assist advancement professionals to distinguish the benefits of correlating alumni relations and organizational identification. The basic procedures in reporting the results of a qualitative study are to develop descriptions and themes within the data and to convey multiple perspectives from participants through detailed descriptions of the settings and individuals (Creswell, 2009). The objective of an exploratory study leads to insights and remains flexible for a research process that is unstructured with a small, non-representative sample (Gupta & Gupta, 2011). Initial exploratory studies can serve as the building blocks for further exploratory conclusive research (Gupta & Gupta, 2011).

The 10 open-ended questions in this study were designed to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on their undergraduate experience and the effect it may or may not have on their alumni involvement status (Appendix C). The researcher transcribed and analyzed the

participant's reflections for common themes, which produced the study's findings as well as future research opportunities. Thematic analysis is a data analysis process in qualitative research to determine a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of a phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). The transcriptions were reviewed to collect data on the participants' understandings and viewpoints of their undergraduate experience and alumni roles.

Findings

Perception of Organizational Identification

The participants in this study offered insights into the concept of organizational identification and how it connects to alumni relations. Their knowledge on the topic coincided with existing research regarding the value of a relationship with one's alma mater. Organizational identification includes a sense of belonging, loyalty, and shared characteristics (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The participants involved in this exploratory research study were asked about their knowledge of the organizational identification concept and their perception of how it fits into alumni relations. The importance of this pairing is significant for university advancement professionals, but it is also critical to alumni who have the potential to maintain a connection with the institution.

The participants were asked what knowledge and understanding they had of organizational identification and how it corresponds to alumni relations. This question was the foundation of the study in order to establish a point of reference on the research objective. There was a general understanding from the participants that the study was focused on a connection with their alma mater. With this awareness, there is an opportunity for alumni and collegiate

institutions to maintain a long-term relationship. If alumni recognize the benefit of a connection to their alma mater using organizational identification, the options for involvement and financial support are numerous.

Question 1: Based on the description, what is your understanding of organizational identification and how does it pertain to alumni relations? For participants' responses, see Table 4.

Table 4

Participant Feedback on the Understanding of Organization Identification and its Relationship to Alumni Relations

Participant	Summarized Responses
P1	It is part of my value system, it is part of my roots, it is part of my identity, and it is a strong influence on "who I became."
P2	Organizational identification is an individual's allegiance to a particular organization or group. The organization or group could be their alma mater, their employer, a non-profit group, community service, or their church. It could be to any number of organizations. The office of alumni relations at educational institutions seek to clarify and to expand or enhance the organizational identification that alumni have with their alma mater.
P4	I can see from my experience, to the extent that I stay connected, that it is tied up in identity. I was there at a formative of time in my life. It shaped who I am. I draw a lot from that experience. It shaped my values and the way that I want to live my life. I learned a lot about myself there. I think a lot of it is tied up with my identity. It is nostalgic.
P14	I suppose that if you work in alumni relations, you should see a correlation. The goal is essentially to connect to your alumni, and I guess the way to do that would be to foster a sense of connection and identity while students are still enrolled. We certainly can reach out afterwards, but I think it really begins with the experience a student has with an institution while at the institution.
P3	Organizational identification is essential to building donor loyalty, which is one of the top priorities. You want your donors to feel a sense of the community that they can be active contributors due to their stronger, positive identification with the university. The stronger the social pressure is to give, the more funding for the university.

P5	There has to be something in common in order to bring people together: a task or a common belief or a shared history or shared experience. It is beyond books and knowledge. It is the creation of a whole person, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. All of those things create a more complete person who can tackle his/her life.
----	---

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) research focused significantly on organizational identification. The researchers' findings point to organizational identification in relation to the individual's commitment, satisfaction, loyalty, involvement, and attachment. Organizational identification within university advancement allows the institution and alumni to comprehend the possibilities of maintaining a productive connection. For former students and university advancement directors to understand how organizational identification and alumni relations correlate, it is important to establish a frame of reference on how this relationship can provide mutual benefits.

Academic and Social Collegiate Experience

The frequency of involvement with one's alma mater has the potential to bolster positive goodwill and perceptions leading to increased alumni membership within the institution (Newman & Petrokos, 2011). The researchers measured the alumni's attitudes in regards to the likelihood of returning to campus events or alumni reunions, the academic experience, the pride in the institution's reputation, and their social experiences. The collegiate experience encompasses both the academic and social aspects for a student. This dual aspect further explains how alumni reflect upon their experience in ways that offer a connection to their alma mater. P10 recalls the academic experience as offering a reason to identify with the alma mater and to develop a strong relationship. "Academically, being in the smaller programs, I knew my professors, and I had connections with my classmates. In terms of organizationally, I worked in

the admissions office. I also was a student senator” (P10, personal communication, August 2013). P4 experienced quality collegiate experience, which created a connection with a diverse group.

I was involved in a psych research lab in my sophomore year. There were 40 undergrads in that lab. I had a lot of those as friends, and then some PhD students mixed in. It was kind of an interesting group. (P4, personal communication, July 2013)

The social aspect of the collegiate experience allowed the participants to remark on how it shaped them as undergraduate students, which may establish a future alumni–institution connection. P6 offered an example of a social experience that enhanced the higher educational involvement.

I think that I had experiences outside the classroom that helped me grow in ways that classes did inside the classroom. As I look back on it now ... it was probably my junior year, I agreed to participate in a weeklong immersion experience in Chicago helping teachers in an inner city elementary school for a week during winter break. (P6, personal communication, July 2013)

Weerts and Ronca (2007) examined the variables of academic engagement and social engagement. The study concludes that those alumni who report higher levels of academic and social engagement as an undergraduate student will be more likely to financially support or volunteer to the institution. In a related study, the relationship with the university was shaped during the undergraduate experience, which is when the relationship with the college develops, grows, and is firmly set in place (Gaier, 2005). The researcher notes, because both academic and social engagement shape the college experience so predominately, it is beneficial to study the results individually (Gaier, 2005). Table 5 presents the interview responses pertaining to the

former student's academic experiences. Table 6 lists the participant responses of their social experiences as undergraduates. The study of these two variables determines how the experiences affected the former students as undergraduates and how each variable may influence involvement with their alma mater. The findings from the interviewees represent a positive academic and social experience while the participants were undergraduate students. The results did not appear to favor the academic experience over the social experience or vice versa. It may infer that the collegiate experience, academic, social, or combined, has a high potential for maintaining a long-term relationship with the institution. This conclusion has positive implications and may allow the experience of the alumni an opportunity to connect with the university, which may prove to be an overall benefit to the success of higher education.

Question 2: What is your perception of the academic experience you encountered as an undergraduate student? See Table 5 for participants' responses.

Table 5

Participant Perception of Academic Experience as an Undergraduate

Participant	Summarized Responses
P11	I think it was high quality. Some classes challenged me, especially in the College of Business. I am not a math person. Statistics, calculus, and accounting were all very challenging for me. In areas where I have stronger skills, like marketing or communication classes, I would excel in those. That is where my skill set lies, but I always appreciated that we had to take history, English, philosophy, and theology.
P2	Excellent, I would say it was excellent. There was a lot of personal attention, and there were clear expectations. It felt as though it was the right fit for me.
P3	I do not know if I was conscious of it, thinking in a very reflective way. My primary goal was to get through the classes, to get a degree, and to get a job.

P4	I was connected, I would say, through my major. I have many friends in that major. I was in the honors program too, so that was definitely a community for me.
P6	I had a good academic experience. I had faculty members that I had for multiple classes so I had the opportunity to know them, and they learned to know me. I think I was challenged academically. I feel like I learned a lot intellectually, but I grew significantly along the way.
P7	Phenomenal, I had a very positive academic experience.
P8	It was good. It is an accelerated adult only program. You get many people who are working or single parents, so you get many different experiences that way.
P14	It was good. I do not have any regrets about choosing the institution that I did. It varied in my classes of course, but I do feel that it was very good. I was studying all the time.

Question 3: What is your perception of the social experience you encountered as an undergraduate student? See Table 6 for participant's responses to this question.

Table 6

Participant Perception of Social Experience as an Undergraduate

Participant	Summarized Responses
P3	I was not involved with many formal clubs, but I did have a good group of friends that went on trips together. I just went to Las Vegas a month and a half ago with several of them.
P1	I was very involved in the College of Journalism. I wrote for the newspaper, and I was an assistant editor for the journal. Then socially, I went to basketball games. I lived in the dorms for two years and then lived in off campus housing for my junior and senior year. It does give you a strong identity.
P7	I was heavily involved socially. I was a house fellow so I had a ton of social contacts, in not only my residence, but with other house fellows and other students. I was involved in intramurals and in student government. Once I became a house fellow, I was involved in house

P7 (cont.)	government, which is on a smaller scale, but you still have to plan and interact, parties, budgets, and things of that nature. I was on homecoming court.
P10	Every year I was there, I was involved in something with student development, such as being a representative to an organization. We actually had two centers. I was involved in French club, and I had a hall mate who was on the swim team. We were a division 3 school, but I would go and cheer for her. I also worked for the catering departments.
P2	I did not have a lot of time for extracurricular activities, but I certainly was involved. I was involved in the sailing club, which was the biggest one, but I also was involved in other items here and there. I think my closest friends were those in my economics study group. In fact, we still get together to this day.

The participants in this study reflected on their academic and social involvement in a very positive manner. The variety of involvement included social clubs, shared classes, student life activities, and work programs. The participants specified they received positive academic advising, encountered supportive professors, and were aware of a wide variety of social programs. Participants reflected on the aspects of their personal experiences and the impact these events had on their undergraduate experience. The participants in the study, as well as the review of the literature, appear to coincide regarding the importance of a positive collegiate experience.

Alumni Demographic Information

One obstacle of colleges and universities is to develop lasting connections with alumni and to update their demographic information. Changes within demographic information, such as local address, occupation, employer, and marital status, lead to a disconnection over time. Levine (2008) noted that the frequency of certain communication pieces, including alumni magazines and alumni electronic newsletters, was positively associated with alumni giving or involvement. For annual fund and campaign appeal letters, the results were mixed on the impact of these

communication pieces offering positive and negative association with alumni giving and participation (Levine, 2008). The timing of updating demographic information offers a unique challenge to university advancement. Upon graduation, P11 mentioned that other areas take priority before updating demographic information. “Graduating seniors do not know where they are moving, and I remember feeling like that on graduation day” (P11, personal communication, September 2013).

As alumni demographic variables change, such as local address, occupation, employer, as well as marital status, a loss of connection between the institution and its alumni groups can result. P7 remarked on the benefits of a user-friendly website to update personal information. “The Alumni Association has a great website. I suppose that is another way to connect, too. I also get alumni mail newsletters, but yes, all my information is up-to-date” (P7, personal communication, July 2013).

Sung and Yang (2009) indicated that the university needs to foster student participation and involvement through effective communication methods with alumni. Levine’s (2008) study revealed that it is important to interpret the effects of the institution’s communication pieces to enhance the relationship with their alumni, including their frequency, format, and content. New technology has enabled university communication officials to be in touch with alumni with greater frequency and consistency (Levine, 2008). With the increase in social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Pinterest, advancement departments can utilize different methods beyond print material to reach out to alumni. The feedback from the participants in the interviews revealed mixed results regarding updated demographic information. The reason information was not kept up-to-date was due to no longer living with parents, moving, or disinterest in alumni mailings. The participants did indicate that the information was sent or

accessible, but they did not stay actively involved in keeping current profiles with their alma mater. A majority of the alumni commented they might have received alumni information shortly after graduation; however, due to life changes, the material was either not received or did not make an impact on the alumni. To improve reliability of contact information, updates through Facebook alumni groups could be effective for graduates.

Question 4: Is your personal information (location, occupation, e-mail address, marital status) current with your alma mater, and do they remain in contact with you regarding events, news updates, and other alumni news? See Table 7 for participants' responses to this question.

Table 7

Participant Personal Information Current with Alma Mater

Participant	Summarized Responses
P14	I do not remember. Shortly after I graduated, I moved. I was living at home with my parents. Then I moved out, so I do not know. It happened so long ago. I do not know if I was getting stuff. Two years after that, I moved across the country, so there was no contact.
P9	I would probably guess, no. I have not gotten anything from them. I think my parents probably still do at their house. I do not actively search for it, but if I do see something, I will read it. If I see something coming through on Twitter or Facebook, usually I will stop to read it. Generally, whenever I see news, I will actively search for more information.
P13	I think I just updated it recently. I use my mom's address, because I actually just moved last summer, and I have moved probably about six times in the last 10 years. I get two magazines. I also get a monthly email for alumni.
P4	You have to be a member of the alumni association. There is a fee. My parents got me that when I graduated. It was a lifetime membership. I still get all that, and I pay attention, being in higher education, and the large part is to get ideas. Email, I get some mailings, some invitations to some formal events, but it is mostly junk mail. They are the only ones that I have gone to ... there have been three, so I do not go to too many. A couple of them were good.

P8	We receive the Alumni Magazine; we get the emails asking for donations and support. We really have not donated much, but we do help when we can if they ask for surveys, information, testimonials, or something like that. They know they can just reach out to us, and we are more than happy to help, because we are happy with our education there and our experience.
P10	They did. In fact, I remember when we graduated, there was something in with our diploma cover, an envelope that said welcome to the alumni association. It talked about getting involved and all of that. I remember the first couple of years after I graduated I worked in the New York City area. It was geographically closer. Yes, I made sure it was updated, because I think the link was fresher then.

Current information and better communication with alumni allow the institution to cultivate the relationship, which leads to a beneficial future for higher education. Communication methods and updated demographic facts on alumni offer an opportunity for university advancement to stay connected with the graduates. The responses from those in this study represent a possible disconnect in communication from their undergraduate universities. This disengagement can cause problems if institutions lose their alumni base for participation as well as donations. The participants were interested in simple ways to stay connected and to receive information that was pertinent to their areas of undergraduate study or current interests.

Alumni Volunteers and Political Advocates

Weerts et al. (2010) acknowledge the essential roles alumni offer to charitable giving. They also studied support of universities through volunteering and political advocacy. The common theme from the participants in this exploratory study is the need to find the right niche to be involved. The participants also expressed a desire to be asked to become involved with the university. The study by Weerts and Ronca (2008) indicates alumni who volunteer do so based on capacity (life cycles, demographic indicators) and inclination (weighing the opportunity

costs). P6 comments on the volunteer role as a mentor to prospective students and the connection the role offers.

I think I see my responsibility as sharing my experience with prospective students and their families in a way that reaffirms whatever the choice is going to be. The information I would share includes what my experience has been, what I know to be true of the college, the kind of place it is, what it did for me while I was there, and what it has meant to me in the time since I have left. (P6, personal communication July 2013)

P2 indicates how alumni share a unique perspective to prospective students.

I support the university and share the following information with prospective college students: what the entire process is, what it is like to be in school, what is appropriate to ask of their institution, and what is not appropriate to ask of their institution. (P2, personal communication, June 2013)

P8 mentions the opportunity to give referrals.

I have talked to other people, that are already in the workforce or looking for an evening or part-time education, concerning my college experience. We always highly recommend it, because it is a good way to obtain, not to say a quick degree, but an accelerated degree and that you are not stuck going a semester at a time. We always recommend it to people that bring it up. We had a good experience there. (P8, personal communication, July 2013).

The researcher asked the participants in the interviews how they perceive their roles as a volunteer, mentor, or advocate for their alma mater. Through this analysis, advancement directors may utilize the former students' interests, skills, and qualities to enhance the future of higher education.

Question 5: Do you serve as a mentor/recruiter for prospective students, a board member, or a volunteer, and do you perceive your role as an alumnus essential to the community as well as to potential students? For participants' responses, see Table 8.

Table 8

Participation Role as an Alumnus to the Alma Mater

Participant	Summarized Responses
P1	I am a professional job mentor, and I am an advisor to honor students. When you talk to students that you see at Preview, you can say I remember being you, and I remember going through this. It is easy to talk about a place you believe in.
P2	All the time, I used to be the Associate Dean of Admissions, and I used to coordinate the alumni volunteers for the office of admissions before the responsibility moved to university advancement. I am very familiar with alumni volunteer programs. I think alumni can represent the university very well at career fairs, at college fairs, and perhaps, in doing interviews of prospective students. As long as they are prepared, alumni serve an important role in representing the institution to prospective students.
P9	I do not think anyone directly asked me. It was through my involvement with SAA, Student Alumni Association. You can do this, this, and this after graduation, but I do not think I ever had any direct requests after graduation, at least not that I can recall. No prospective students or parents asked me about my experience.
P4	No one asked me, and I have not looked into it. If asked, I would volunteer, or if I came across something that fits my schedule, I would volunteer.
P5	Officially, I have not done much. Although, I feel one or two people approach me every year. Three cousins were interested and at least applied, although none of them went to the school. A few family friends from the high school or town that I grew up in approached me and a couple did attend the university. My wife is a high school teacher so every year she typically gives out applications.
P6	I am on the alumni board of my alma mater and serve as the vice president. For a number of years, I would go to an event here or there but not very often. I think for me, it was just another way to acknowledge that I had a transformative experience there. How do I give back to that?

P6 (cont.)	The alumni director at the time asked me, because he knew me. He had been the director of a camp where I worked.
------------	--

The alumni in this study did state that periodically they were asked to speak informally with prospective students regarding their alma mater. The majority did not take an active role as a volunteer, recruiter, mentor, or political advocate. Research has previously focused on how the volunteer role can create philanthropic support. Weerts et al. (2010) focused on how college and university leaders evaluate whether current efforts to encourage alumni support are effective. The findings provide an analysis whether alumni are responding or not responding to institutional solicitations for involvement. The researchers offer methods for future research to start building models that examine attributes of alumni who are most likely to engage in various support behaviors. Building alumni attribute models could be significant, because this knowledge may be beneficial to match alumni with support opportunities, increase the efficiency and quality of alumni recruiting efforts, and achieve better advancement outcomes. Some of the participants maintained a volunteer role; however, there is potential to increase this participation in an effort to benefit the recruitment, mentorship, and financial aspects of higher education. Weerts and Ronca (2008) studied the reasons alumni can be valuable volunteers. Their research points to alumni volunteers serving in political advocacy roles to secure financial support, assist with lobbying procedures, as well as maintain a solid networking system for higher education.

The interview results found the participants were somewhat active in volunteer roles, but unless they were asked or found the right niche that was personal and important to them, the likelihood of greater involvement diminished. Alumni can offer the potential of being a financial supporter to their alma mater. The differences pertaining to volunteer roles are the time

constraints of the participant, the desire to be involved, the initiative of the institution to ask for assistance, and the proximity to the university.

Athletic Programs

One area of great interest to alumni relations is whether there is a connection to the alma mater because of the institution's athletic programs. Meer and Rosen (2009) analyzed the impact of the athletic programs on the institution-alumni relationship by measuring the significance of the success of an athletic team. Martinez et al. (2010) indicated that across 30 years of empirical study, intercollegiate athletics has a small but significant influence on institutional fundraising and that donors who are alumni are influenced more by athletic success than non-alumni donors. P7 recalled having an interest in athletics.

Then I had football tickets, hockey tickets, and went to basketball games. I did not have season tickets for basketball, but I had season tickets for football and hockey the whole time I was there. These opportunities were just fantastic. (P7, personal communication, August 2013)

Another alumnus referred to his/her current proximity to the institution as it relates to supporting athletics. "If they are playing in the area, I definitely would try to go to it" (P8, personal communication, August 2013).

Multiple studies show that while athletic teams, such as football and basketball, draw more attention, they may not substantially affect the alumni donations. The effects of successful athletic teams seem to increase the giving of the former team members. None of the participants within this study played on an athletic team nor did that aspect of their collegiate experience take precedence. There was not a strong indication that the success of the athletic programs resulted in higher donations or the likelihood to become more involved with their alma mater. The

participants did express interest in athletic programs and continued to keep track of their success. The emphasis of the athletic programs did not have a large impact on giving or volunteering.

Question 6: Does your alma mater have any athletic programs, and do you support these programs through attendance at relevant activities, such as homecoming events, ceremonies, or award banquets? Table 9 presents the participants' responses to this question.

Table 9

Participant Support of Alma Mater Athletic Programs

Participant	Summarized Responses
P4	I attend maybe one event a year. I would love to go back for a basketball game, but the tickets are very hard to come by, so I do not put much effort into that. I go about once a year, and I do not financially support athletic programs.
P14	It is funny. I just was not interested in any of that, they are not really on the map. Not that much, maybe basketball.
P1	I am interested in soccer now. My daughter has played soccer throughout high school, and just being involved in the high school soccer creates an interest in soccer for me.
P6	They actually have a very successful program. The hockey program has won the Division III national championship over the past couple of years. They are also very successful in football, and they have gone to Division III national tournaments. I do not think they have ever won a national championship for football. There are some good Division III schools. In my junior and senior years, I lived with some people who were involved in athletics, the quarterback of the football team and a classmate who played basketball. I can probably count on one hand the number of athletic events I went to there, so it just was not part of my experience. I just did not go to a lot of that stuff. I have not really gone to many games as an alumnus. I have gone back for homecoming, but I did not attend the football game.

Stinson and Howard's (2008) study indicates that the more successful the larger athletic teams are at an institution, the greater the likelihood of alumni donations to support athletics and

academia. The results from the interviews suggest that athletics is not the sole reason alumni donate to their alma mater.

Alumni Donations

The advancement department of the institution should be aware of the factors that come into play regarding the decision to make a donation, because alumni donations are essential for the financial health of the organization. Successful fundraising may require a long-term investment of time and the cultivation of a positive relationship with individual alumni (Tsao & Coll, 2005). The researchers indicate that communication and involvement with alumni, satisfaction with the quality of education, as well as personal income status factor into the decision of alumni giving (Tsao & Coll, 2005). Researchers support the notion that a robust membership in the alumni association provides the needed funding, but it is also of value to the higher education institution that is the source of its members (Newman & Petrosko, 2011). Weerts and Ronca (2007) analyzed alumni decisions to give and to volunteer, and they found that their decisions might be more closely aligned with personal values about philanthropy and volunteerism than institutional efforts to cultivate support. They suggest institutional leaders in alumni relations should ask the following two questions: How are these attitudes formed? Are these values cultivated at the institution or elsewhere (Weerts & Ronca, 2007)? P10 pointed out the connection factor of restricting a donation.

I think I would restrict it to something that I had a connection. Whether or not to send a student abroad or to fund a student to go to their language programs might not be meaningful to me. If they said, we want to give a scholarship to a student from a rural location. The request is more relevant to me since I came from a rural location. (P10, personal communication, August 2013).

P14 discussed his/her thoughts on donations. “Maybe if it was some cause that I thought was important, maybe a scholarship to College of Ed or whatever. Maybe I would donate, but I probably would restrict it based on my interests” (P14, personal communication, September 2013). Sung and Yang (2009) suggest that persuading the entire alumni population for donations for an extended period after graduation or investing a large amount of resources to maintain a good reputation are inefficient uses of scarce financial and office resources.

Question 7 not only focuses on the charitable giving component, but it looks at what compels the alumni to donate and how to restrict the donation. While the success of an athletic program provides visibility, it may not always hold the interest of alumni donors. It is important to understand if a successful athletic team yields more donations or if the personal connection of the graduate to a scholarship program garners more donations.

Question 7: Do you donate annually to your alma mater and is it restricted to a specific area within the institution? See Table 10 for the participants’ responses.

Table 10

Participation in Donations to Alma Mater

Participant	Summarized Responses
P4	I do make donations. It has been a couple of years now. There were a few years where it was annual, but it is probably every other year at this point. I do restrict it to the psychology department.
P6	I do, and I have for a number of years. I gave long before I was involved with the alumni board. I always restricted it to leadership or service programs like the kinds of things I did when I went on that trip to Chicago. More recently, I give more money now that I am on their alumni board. They are in a capital campaign now, so we have made a pledge within the context of the capital campaign, but again, it is still focused on leadership development, those kinds of things.
P3	Well, I do now, but I only donate to the Peace Center. I waited until they asked me.

P13	No. I am trying to get my fourth college degree. I would like to eventually, but I am just working on some things first. I think I would donate half for the general fund and half for the scholarships, something like that. Not too specific.
P12	We do donate to the campaign, and I usually restrict it to something. When we had kids at the childcare center, I would restrict donations to that area. We often would contribute to the Breadwinners Fund.

For those participants that specified that they donate to their alma mater, they prefer to restrict their donations to a certain area of interest. For those participants who currently do not make donations, if they were to, it would be to an area of personal interest. These findings are important and coincide with the literature. University advancement professionals may benefit by taking note of the interest of alumni when it comes to donation restrictions. Many of the participants remarked how they would restrict their donations to a scholarship program or within their college of study. These findings may offer a more effective way for institutions to solicit donations.

Financial Assistance and Alumni

The participants reflected on their experiences regarding receiving financial aid and scholarships and the influence of these experiences on their alumni involvement. Question 8 offered the opportunity to examine if the financial support they received instilled a feeling of responsibility to remain connected to their alma mater. P6 reflected on an academic scholarship.

They have an academic scholarship called the trustees scholarship. It is not based on financial need; it is based on economic merit. It is the highest scholarship that they award. The scholarship was a major reason for me to choose my university. (P6, personal communication, July 2013)

Although P8 received financial assistance, the connection from this factor was not as strong, but it did make an impact. “It definitely helped. My parents were willing to pay a certain amount for the first couple of years of college” (P8, personal communication, August 2013). The participant went on to reflect on the question of whether or not a financial aid recipient is instilled with a larger responsibility to donate. “Probably not, since I was fortunate enough to have my parents take care of the majority of the financial side. At the time, I did not see the direct benefit of the scholarship” (P8, personal communication, August 2013). P5 considers financial assistance in correlation to giving.

The model is so complex; I still have a hard time understanding or feeling comfortable about what the need is or how those decisions are made. Just partially, I have only made a few donations specifically for scholarships. In general, I feel the cost of an education is the bigger question versus scholarships individually. (P8, personal communication, July 2013)

Researchers noted that scholarship aid reduces the size of a gift but has little effect on the probability of making a gift (Meer & Rosen, 2012). Within one study, it did not appear that financial assistance induced alumni to give back more generously (Meer & Rosen, 2012). This study also expanded on financial aid in the form of campus jobs, which also did not have a strong effect on donations. Holmes et al. (2008) state that some former student aid recipients experience lower salaries and/or may still be repaying loans to the college; and therefore, they are less generous givers. For this latter reason, it was found loan recipients to be less generous than grant recipients.

Question 8: Did you receive a financial aid package or scholarship in order to attend your chosen college or university and does this affect your continued involvement or non-involvement with your alma mater? Table 11 presents the summarized responses of the participants.

Table 11

Participant Financial Support as an Undergraduate

Participant	Summarized Responses
P2	I received scholarships, absolutely. I remember distinctly writing thank you letters to the donors. I always wrote thank you notes. Now, there is a more formalized, efficient, streamlined program at University Advancement, but that stuck with me. Someone was going to donate money that I was going to use. I was definitely going to be grateful.
P10	I want to say yes, now that I think about it. I had work-study obviously. Yes, I must have gotten something. I did get many of the connections in the offices where I worked.
P7	I did. So going back to a previous question, that was important for me, so when would I consider giving? I definitely would consider that. I got some grants. I may have gotten some scholarships, but they were relatively small ones, and then I took loans.
P11	For me, I do not think it matters. The financial aid that I received was the knowledge that I had to pay off my student loans. It does not affect why I give. I know the benefit of scholarships, and I give so that other students can have scholarships, but my own experience does not come into play. I have friends that received either full or partial scholarships for athletics, academics, or service, and I know that they would not have been here without it.

These findings suggest an appreciation of financial assistance, but it does not necessarily guarantee alumni donor support. University advancement should not count on a reciprocal giving pattern from financial aid recipients. The majority of the participants who received some form of aid did not specify that as a reason that they donate. They did not appear to make the connection between the support they received and the obligation to provide the same advantage to another.

Their giving patterns revolved more around the areas of their collegiate experiences, which had the greatest impact, such as a solid academic experience, scholarship involvement, or social program. The findings appear to indicate a personal connection is based on the collegiate experience rather than financial assistance.

Alma Mater Reputation

The research results found significant pride among the alumni regarding their alma mater. Although each experience differed, all the participants remarked on the positive impact that their alma mater had on their lives. Sung and Yang's (2009) study on the student-university relationship and reputation offers an exploration of the supportive behavioral intentions to donate based on specific factors. All of the participants stated the reputation of their alma mater held great importance. P5 commented on the question of whether or not they would donate if their alma mater's reputation diminished. "It would certainly cause me to reevaluate my donation level or the way in which I affiliate with the university" (P5, personal communication, July 2013). P2 stated, "It is the integrity of my degree and the degrees of several hundred other people, who graduated from here" (personal communication, June 2013).

Sung and Yang (2009) recommend that universities need to cultivate relationships with students as well as manage a favorable reputation in order to increase the support of alumni. A related research study indicates that the reputation of an institution forms perceptions of the organization shared by its multiple constituents over time (Alessandri, Yang, & Kinsey, 2006). The common responses suggest that any negative impact in reputation toward their alma mater brings about a sense of disappointment, lack of pride, and question of legitimacy of the university mission. Some of the comments referred to the effect that the university's reputation has on the community and on the future of higher education.

Question 9: How would you feel if the college or university you attended did not have a well-respected reputation or was not financially sound? See Table 12 for participants' responses.

Table 12

Participant Perception of Alma Mater

Participant	Summarized Responses
P4	For me, I think it would hit me at a couple of different levels. One is as an alumnus that would be difficult, but also just from ... let us look at the health of our state.
P6	I think I would be disappointed. I think I would also be surprised.
P8	I would be disappointed, but I think they are building a better reputation as they go. They are getting the word out and getting more people to go through the programs to see what the university is actually like. It is building a stronger reputation.
P10	Definitely, disappointment. At that point, I would probably write my letter to the board about what has happened to the fine institution that I knew.
P2	Hopefully, the alumni, who are taught to think critically and not believe the first thing they hear or read, understand that the university does think or makes decisions, because it has to.
P11	I would feel less pride.
P5	If it is due to lack of management, lack of oversight, or lack of planning, and you do not feel comfortable with the current leadership addressing that in a good way, then in terms of financially supporting the university, you would have to question it a lot.

Prospective Students

The final interview question in this study refers to the perception of universities to prospective students from the vantage point of the alumni. The health of the economy, the competition among institutions, and the interests of prospective students are the future of higher education. Alumni relations can serve as an asset to the growth of higher education. When

questioned about how the interviewees' alma mater fits into prospective student recruitment, the participants in the study offered useful insight. P8 states, "I think with more and more people going through the program, they get more testimonials. More people who go through the program talk about it, and it is getting better. The perception is getting better" (personal communication, July 2013). P4 remarks, "The school has a global reputation especially in a lot of countries that have tech and science industries" (personal communication, July 2013).

Palli and Mamilla (2012) indicated that there are changes taking place worldwide, and the educational institutions today face fresh responsibilities and challenges to prepare students for the future. Higher education institutions need to rely on alumni to help with recruitment and mentorship of prospective students. These outcomes are sought by those professionals who share the responsibilities of marketing and advancement in higher education (McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2006). The participants responded that the reputation of an institution, location as well as family legacy, are critical to prospective students. The competition among universities offers alumni relations the opportunity to promote their university to incoming students. The opinions of former students can be a valuable asset when speaking about their undergraduate experiences.

Question 10: How do you see your alma mater fitting in locally or nationally to prospective students? See Table 13 for participants' responses.

Table 13

Prospective Students

Participant	Summarized Responses
P3	Alumni relations has to do a better job of working on the university to say how can we be competitive and show that we are good stewards of multiple resources, because if you are asking people with three or four kids to shell out \$120,000 - \$150,000, that's just not doable.
P1	There is such a long legacy in families that I think some families will make it work somehow.

P7	Now you can go on any website, you get a tour of the campus, you get statistics, you get costs, and you get rankings. You can find out crime statistics for whatever campus, if it is a safe campus or not. Therefore, the available information is far superior to what I believe we had back in the day. I went in thinking more about reputation than anything else.
P14	I think they are looking for schools with a good reputation. Affordability is important for everybody in some sense. Location of the school is probably important.

Discussion

Developing a Connection

The major findings in this study show that organizational identification within alumni relations is an area of importance to the future of higher education. Participants in the study referred to organizational identification using terms such as value system, identity, strong influence, fondness, and sense of community. These findings coincided with the definition of organizational identification by Ashforth and Mael (1989) stating organizational identification includes a sense of belonging, loyalty, and shared characteristics. All 14 participants made statements that organizational identification is a concept, which can explain their connection to their alma mater. The theme of identifying with their alma mater is formed through organizational identification, which offers the foundation of the study.

All of the participants mentioned that a connection to their alma mater resulted from a positive academic and social collegiate experience. This common theme creates results that point to the university creating a constructive collegiate experience. This experience developed through a positive academic experience due to mentorship and guidance from advisors, common interest of studies with other students, and a connection to the university. Campus programs, clubs, activities, and on-campus housing developed a strong social experience. These results

represent the importance of the student experience on the future of alumni. The results denote the higher the satisfaction as an undergraduate student the better the opportunity to develop a strong relationship to the alma mater. Personal experiences during the undergraduate years create a connection with the university and a potential for alumni to develop a long-term relationship.

Maintaining a Connection

Communication from their alma mater was an area that the participants offered perspectives on including the type of information they receive and their current demographic information status (up-to-date or out-of-date). The communication pieces referred to in Question 4 included alumni magazines, appeal letters, and e-newsletters. The participants were asked if their demographic information was up-to date in order to receive the materials. Statements, such as I do not know, I am sure my address was updated, and I have no idea, denote a possible disconnect with the alumni when it comes to maintaining updated demographic information. One participant stated that upon graduation, alumni might not be focused on staying connected, because other goals, such as job search and relocation, are of importance. Levine (2008) stated that new technology has enabled university communication officials to be in touch with alumni with greater frequently and consistency. The findings were split on their interest in receiving information: Some alumni were interested in receiving information, and other alumni stated they went so far as to be put on a do not solicit listing. University advancement professionals will need to decipher the best means of keeping their alumni engaged after graduation to fulfill volunteer and philanthropic roles.

Athletics and Alumni

Athletic programs provide exposure to the media and to the public for a university. The participants in the study continued to follow stories regarding the athletic programs at their alma

mater even though they may not have sought out the information. Updates via e-newsletters, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media offered ways to receive some information. The one finding that coincided with the literature review is that the success of the athletic programs did not affect the alumni's decision to donate. Martinez et al. (2010) noted that across 30 years of empirical study, intercollegiate athletics has a small but significant influence on institutional fundraising. The university's exposure to the community and nationwide is beneficial to promote the school; however, from the participant interviews as well as the literature, university advancement should not rely on this area to increase donations.

Alumni Giving

Some major findings indicate the factors that influence alumni to donate to their alma mater. Five of the participants stated that they currently donate to their alma mater, and they restrict it to a specific area of interest. The nine other participants stated that they may be interested in donating and would restrict it to an area of interest or personal connection. These findings are significant, because it represents the concept of organizational identification pertaining to alumni donations. The participants indicated a connection to a certain area of interest, such as educational programs or scholarships, which was important to their collegiate experience. This finding coincides with establishing a positive academic and social experience for students, which can lead to future involvement. The literature review, through various studies, pointed toward the positive views of the institution by the alumni. All of the participants, current donors or prospective donors, remarked on the importance of restricting a donation to an area of interest.

Future Implications

This exploratory, qualitative research study was conducted to develop an understanding of organizational identification and to determine how the concept can benefit alumni relations. The purpose of this research study was to determine the reasons alumni continue their involvement with their alma maters and to what extent. Current research provides insight into the background on alumni giving, the effectiveness of communication with former students, the significance of successful athletic programs, and the impact of the university's reputation on alumni and on prospective students. The alumni interviews, which were conducted with participants in various graduating years, offered comparable results to the literature review. The major findings in this qualitative study include:

- Organizational identification may benefit both alumni relations professionals and former students.
- The academic and social experience as an undergraduate student has a significant impact on alumni involvement and philanthropy.
- Alumni are more likely to volunteer or donate based on a personal connection rather than due to the success of the athletic program or that they received financial support.
- Communication with alumni should be timely using social media and be of interest based on the area of study or social involvement.
- Reputation of the university and its effect on prospective students was important to alumni.

The future of higher education relies on the support of universities by their alumni. By utilizing the concept of organizational identification, alumni relations departments can encourage that support. Universities rely on alumni for donations to provide financial support to scholarship

programs, campus renovations, and additional programming. Alumni serve in volunteer roles allowing them to network within their profession, community, and prospective students. In addition, former students have the ability to advocate for their alma mater. All of these examples demonstrate reasons universities should develop a relationship with current undergraduates and should cultivate their roles for the future as alumni.

Alumni relations' success appears to be influenced by the collegiate experience of the undergraduate students prior to graduation. By working with other areas of the college, university advancement has an opportunity to affect higher education significantly. Maintaining a connection with graduates as they move into professional and community roles, universities can encourage former students to support their alma mater financially and through volunteerism. A blend of quality academic advising, curriculum variety, campus programming, dynamic faculty, and strong administration is crucial to providing current students with a positive collegiate experience. There is competition among universities for student recruitment, and a positive experience can benefit the future alumni groups. High standards of a university result in high rankings in accreditation and a meaningful impact on graduates. The quality of the collegiate experience requires an all-encompassing effort of university officials. The university advancement department should develop goals for maintaining organizational identification so the university can reap the benefits of this concept. Developing organizational identification with new and current students should be part of the university's strategic plan. The investment by the administration can result in a thriving alumni group to provide successful student recruitment, increased philanthropy, and positive university reputation to the community.

Universities have the potential to build a connection between undergraduate students and alumni by offering opportunities of internships, community volunteering, and job networking.

This interaction with alumni allows current students to experience opportunities to remain connected to their alma mater in the future. The pairing of current students with alumni creates an opportunity to influence the current student's professional experience. It also is an opportunity to establish the importance of organizational identification and alumni relations.

Donations are significant to the goals of a university, and it is essential for university advancement to understand the reasons alumni donate. From the literature and the participant interviews, the reasons alumni appear to donate are based on a positive academic and social experience (i.e., a program or area of study). Although athletic programs provide a connection to the alma mater because of the media visibility and the success of many programs, they do not appear to be the significant reasons alumni donate. Team members who were a part of a successful athletic program are more likely to donate to their alma mater, but the connection is not present for non-team members. Publicizing successful teams is beneficial for marketing purposes, but it does not necessarily yield donations. The objective for alumni relations professionals is to target donors based on the areas of greatest importance to former students. The areas of interest can be generated by reviewing what alumni follow through social media, their area of undergraduate study, their occupations, and where they live. The participants stated they focus on local, informal alumni gatherings; restrict their donations to areas of personal importance; and maintain connections to their alma mater through social media. These are the areas university advancement can target to increase alumni involvement.

Technology has provided easier methods of communication to extend past the alumni association magazine. Ways to communicate faster and more efficiently are more common with e-newsletters, Twitter and Facebook updates, professional LinkedIn profiles, and alumni blogs. The participants stated the main challenge is keeping their demographic information up-to-date.

Outdated alumni demographics is a roadblock for alumni relations professionals, because once the university loses touch with the former students, it is difficult to engage with them in the future. Participants cite frequency in moving and losing touch over time as reasons for not maintaining their alumni profiles. There needs to be a simple manner in which university advancement reaches out to former students and ways to incentivize them to update their personal information. To maintain updated demographic information, incentives could include alumni membership discounts, invitations to member only events, discounts on tickets and merchandise, and opportunities for special prizes.

The reputation of a university has a lasting impression on undergraduate students, which can benefit university advancement to connect with them as alumni. All of the participants in the study indicated the pride they felt as graduates of their alma mater. The positive experience of the graduates will allow the alumni to be advocates for university advancement in areas such as student recruitment, volunteers, donors, as well as leaders for the institution. The pride of the alumni from an accredited, highly respected university will provide benefits for future generations. University advancement can enhance the reputation by providing positive stories of alumni activities, achievements, as well as community involvement.

Conclusion

Research Limitations

This research study was qualitative, which offered a perspective of alumni through participant interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicate qualitative research explores a topic in depth and in context in order to understand phenomena from participants' perspectives. This type of research elicits tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations.

“Qualitative researchers need to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interactions and observations in natural settings” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 91).

When using qualitative research, its limitations must be factored into the results. Qualitative research does not collect statistical data but rather uses observations and conclusions made by the researcher. A small sample size allows for questions about the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This research study limited the sample size to 14 participants from the same socioeconomic class. Due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to all alumni groups. A purposive sample, also commonly called a judgmental sample, is one that is selected based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study (Babbie, 2012). Other limitations of this qualitative research method include predetermined interview questions, the presence of the researcher in the interviews, and researcher bias interpreting the responses.

Future Research

Although there are limitations to qualitative research, future research can use the results of this study to review the common themes and provide more in-depth studies within specific areas. To expand this study, online surveys, close-ended interviews, focus groups, or case studies can be used, and the results can be compared to the results from this study's participant interviews.

The study focused on 14 alumni from both private and public institutions. Future research can compare alumni from private and public universities, which indicate how the types of institutions compare or differ in their approaches to alumni relations as well as the effect of organizational identification. With the emphasis on higher education, a study could also be

conducted using longitudinal data by tracking a current undergraduate class into their alumni roles and the impact they have upon their alma mater. Longitudinal research could offer a range of changes that may occur over a designated period within a specified undergraduate group as they progress as alumni of the alma mater. Additionally, tracking alumni donations over specific time ranges may further explain if the concept of organizational identification affects graduates and if they are connected to their alma mater. A longitudinal study may provide explanations to how alumni behaviors change in regards to involvement and donation status. Changes in demographics, such as location, occupation, age, personal values, and interests, may offer insight regarding the interests of graduates of the institution.

The interviews in the research were one-on-one with predetermined questions. Future research options provide opportunities to use a focus group of alumni from different graduating classes. This type of study offers more in-depth discussions with a diverse group of alumni in an open forum. The results may develop additional themes that the individual interviews may not have identified. Survey analysis is an option that also develops additional themes using questionnaires which included closed and open-ended questions based on alumni experience and perception. Survey analysis allows for a quantitative and qualitative perspective of study on alumni relations.

Multiple variables were researched in this study such as athletic success, academic and social experience, and communication methods. A replication study using one of these variables in a more in-depth study can focus on the effect it has upon organization identification. Alumni relation professionals may analyze a particular variable and provide expert feedback for the institution and for the future of higher education. Variables could also be compared using more

in-depth analysis indicating to university advancement a significant area to concentrate on for future growth.

Concluding Remarks

This study provides an explanation regarding organizational identification and alumni relations. Universities should develop and maintain alumni relationships in an effort to establish successful institutional advancement for scholarship and financial aid to current students. The connection also allows alumni to mentor prospective students, serve in volunteer roles, highlight the university to the community needs, as well as establish a recruitment approach throughout the local and national level.

The participants in the research study focused on how they experienced a positive academic and social experience. These experiences for current students allow them to develop into alumni who are involved and assist to build and enhance philanthropy as well as volunteer involvement. Demonstrating to current students the significance of alumni roles and their importance to the future of higher education, university advancement professionals can use organizational identification to develop long-term alumni relationships. Educational institutions rely upon their alumni to benefit the future of higher education to the next generation of students.

The research offers options for more in-depth studies regarding how alumni perceive their academic and social experience, how the athletic program affects alumni donors, how the reputation of the university affects the community and prospective students, and how the university advancement department can utilize better methods of communication to maintain an alumni relationship. The significant concluding point is alumni are essential to the success of higher education, and their experience and perceptions of their experience are pivotal to future

involvement for alumni groups. A participant in the research sums up the transformative experience that allows alumni to remain connected at various levels to their alma mater.

My college experience was transformative for me and cemented a professional career, which I enjoy and am successful. I feel my alma mater prepared me well, and I find myself wanting other students to attend my alma mater. These students may also have a similar experience at my university, and they may have the same type of positive transformation. (P11, personal communication, September 2013)

University advancement can capitalize on these transformational experiences as they build a formative relationship with alumni using the concept of organizational identification. The future success of higher education is impacted by alumni relations and the involvement the graduates offer to their alma mater through volunteer and philanthropic involvement.

References

- Alessandri, S. W., Yang, S.-U., & Kinsey, D. F. (2006). An integrative approach to university visual identity and reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 9(4), 258-270.
doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550033
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 20-39.
- Babbie, E. (2012). *The basics of social research (6th Ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Bartels, J., Pryun, A., De Jong, M., & Joustra, I. (2007). Multiple organizational identification levels and the impact of perceived external prestige and communication climate. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(2), 173-190.
- Boros, S. (2008). Organizational identification: Theoretical and empirical analyses of competing conceptualizations. *Romanian Association of Cognitive Science*, 12(1), 1-27.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches (3rd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Davidson-Shivers, G. V., Inpornjivit, K., & Sellers, K. (2004). Using alumni and student databases for program evaluation and planning. *College Student Journal*, 38(4), 510-520.
- Drezner, N. D. (Ed.). (2011). Philanthropy and fundraising in American education [Special Report]. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 37 (2), 1-155. doi:10.1002/ashe.3702
- Gaier, S. (2005). Alumni satisfaction with their undergraduate academic experience and the

- impact on alumni giving and participation. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 5(4), 279-288.
- Gupta, M. & Gupta, D. (2011). *Research Methodology*. New Delhi, India: PHI Learning Private Limited.
- Holmes, J. A., Meditz, J. A., & Sommers, P. M. (2008, October). Athletics and alumni giving: Evidence from a highly selected liberal arts college. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 9(5), 538-552.
- Jones, C., & Volpe, E. H. (2010). Organizational identification: Extending our understanding of social identities through social networks. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(3), 413-434.
- Levine, W. (2008). Communications and alumni relations: What is the correlation between an institution's communication vehicles and alumni annual giving. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 8(3), 176-197.
- Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13(2), 103-123.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research (5th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Martinez, J. M., Stinson, J. L., Kang, M., & Jubenville, C. B. (2010). Intercollegiate athletics and institutional findings: A meta-analysis. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 19(1), 36-47.
- Masterson, K. (2010, February 3). Private giving to colleges dropped sharply in 2009. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <http://chronicle.com/article/private-giving-to-colleges/3879>

- McAlexander, J., Koenig, H., & Schouten, J. (2006). Building the relationships of brand community in higher education: A strategic framework for university advancement. *International Journal of Educational Advancement, 6*(2), 107-118.
- Meer, J., & Rosen, H. S. (2009). The impact of athletic performance on alumni giving: An analysis of microdata. *Economics of Education Review, 28*, 287-294.
- Meer, J., & Rosen, H. S. (2012). Does generosity beget generosity? Alumni giving and undergraduate financial aid. *Economics of Education Review, 31*, 890-907.
- Mitchell, D. (2013). About CASE: About advancement. Retrieved from:
http://www.case.org/About_CASE/About_Advancement.html
- Newman, M. D., & Petrosko, J. M. (2011). Predictors of alumni association membership. *Research in Higher Education, 52*(7), 738-759.
- Palli, J. G., & Mamilla, R. (2012). Students' opinions of service quality in the field of higher education. *Creative Education, 3*(4), 430-438. doi: 10.4236/ce.2012.34067
- Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Stinson, J. L. & Howard, D. R. (2008). Winning does matter: Patterns in private giving to athletic and academic programs at NCAA Division I-AA and I-AAA institutions. *Sports Manager Review, 11*, 1-20.
- Sung, M., & Yang, S. (2009). Student-university relationships and reputation: A study of the links between key factors fostering students' supportive behavioral intentions towards their university. *Higher Education, 57*(6), 787-811.
- Tsao, J. C., & Coll, G. (2005). To give or not to give: Factors determining alumni intent to make

donations as a PR outcome. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 59(4), 381-392.

Weerts, D. J., Cabrera, A. F., & Sanford, T. (2010). Beyond giving: Political advocacy and volunteer behaviors of public university advocacy. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(4), 346-365.

Weerts, D. J., & Ronca, J. M. (2007). Profiles of supportive alumni: Donors, volunteers, and those who “do it all.” *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 7(1), 20-34.

Weerts, D. J., & Ronca, J. M. (2008). Characteristics of alumni donors who volunteer at their alma mater. *Research in Higher Education*, 49(3), 274-292.

Appendix A: IRB Exempt Letter

Office of Research Compliance
Schroeder Complex, 102
P.O. Box 1881
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-1881
P 414.288.7570
F 414.288.6281
W marquette.edu/researchcompliance

May 23, 2013

Ms. Kristen Etzelmueller Professional Studies

Dear Ms. Etzelmueller:

Thank you for submitting your protocol number HR-2619 titled, “*Organizational Identification Within Alumni Relations.*” On May 23, 2013, the Marquette University Institutional Review Board granted exempt status for this protocol under Exemption Category #2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

Your IRB approved informed consent form is enclosed with this letter. Use the stamped copies of this form when recruiting research participants. Each research participant should receive a copy of the stamped consent form for his/her records.

You may proceed with your research. Your protocol has been granted exempt status as submitted. Any changes to your protocol affecting participant risk must be requested in writing by submitting an IRB Protocol Amendment Form, which can be found here: <http://www.marquette.edu/researchcompliance/research/irbforms.shtml>. These changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before being initiated, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the human subjects. If there are any adverse events, please notify the Marquette University IRB immediately.

Please submit an IRB Final Report Form once this research project is complete. Submitting this form allows the Office of Research Compliance to close your file.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Amanda J. Ahrndt, RN, MS, MSN, CIM, CIP IRB Manager

cc: Dr. Christopher Okunseri, IRB Chair; Ms. Leslee Ruscitti, Professional Studies; Ms. Sherri Lex, Graduate School; Ms. Emily Hernandez, Professional Studies Enclosure

Appendix B: Agreement of Consent for Research Participants

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Organizational Identification within Alumni Relations
Kristen Etzelmueller
College of Professional Studies

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate or not.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to analyze if alumni continue their involvement with their alma mater, to what extent and the reasons why. This is an exploratory study, which will examine the topic of interest for future research. You will be one of approximately 12-15 participants interviewed in this research study.

PROCEDURES: You will be interviewed based on a series of often, predetermined and open-ended questions. There is the potential for a follow-up contact for the purpose of clarification. The interview will be recorded with an audio tape recorder and transcribed by the research investigator. If you are not available to be interviewed in person, the interview questions will be sent via e-mail.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of a 30-45 minute interview with the possibility of a follow-up consultation to clarify any questions pertaining to the interview responses.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. Risks include responding to questions that may be minimally uncomfortable. Participants can skip any questions that may make them uncomfortable.

BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits for participants. Indirect benefits may include the potential for developing a positive long term and mutually beneficial relationship between alumni, former classmates and the university. This research will ideally provide insights into ways of effectively increasing the on-going long-term connection between universities or colleges and their alumni.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned an arbitrary code number rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study. The research information and consent forms will be kept by Kristen Etzelmueller, the principal investigator.

The information will be kept in a locked file box in her home and only she will have access to the information. Once survey/interview results have been analyzed and follow-up completed, the results will be downloaded to a secure location and saved without identifying information; emails will be deleted. For interviews, once transcription has occurred and follow-up is complete, audio recordings will be destroyed. The completed and submitted research study will

be shared with Marquette University Advancement. The audio recordings and transcribed notes will remain with the PI only. De-identified data will be maintained indefinitely and may be used for future research purposes. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

EXTRA COSTS TO PARTICIPATE: Transportation costs may be involved to accommodate the interview in a neutral, public location.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study within thirty days of the interview the research documentation from your interview will be destroyed. Once data are de-identified, it will no longer be possible to remove your responses.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Kristen Etzelmueller at 414-737-5018. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

BY PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW AND/OR EMAILING MY RESPONSE TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.



Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Alumni relations departments are common throughout the higher education setting, and the purpose of this research study is to examine the driving forces of organizational identification within the field of alumni relations. Organizational identification refers to the individual identification and connection with a group.

1. Based on the description above, what is your understanding of organizational identification and how does it pertain to alumni relations?
2. What year did you graduate and from which institution?
3. What is your perception of the academic and social experience you encountered as an undergraduate student?
4. Is your personal information (location, occupation, e-mail address, marital status) current with your alma mater and do they remain in contact with you regarding events, news updates and other alumni news?
5. Do you serve as a mentor/recruiter for prospective students, board member or volunteer and how do you perceive your role as an alumni essential to the community as well as to potential students?
6. Does your alma mater have any athletic programs and do you support these programs through attendance at relevant activities such as homecoming events, ceremonies or award banquets?
7. Do you make a donation annually to your alma mater and is it restricted to a specific area within the institution?
8. How would you feel if the college or university you attended did not have a well-respected reputation or was not financially sound?
9. Did you receive a financial aid package or scholarship in order to attend your chosen college or university and does this affect your continued involvement or non-involvement with your alma mater?
10. How do you see your alma mater fitting in locally or nationally to prospective students?