

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND ALUMNI
PARTICIPATION INTEREST AMONG ONLINE, NON-TRADITIONAL,
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A SOUTHEASTERN PRIVATE RELIGIOUS
UNIVERSITY

by Mary Carol Hendrick

A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2017

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities depend heavily on alumni participation in the areas of financial contributions, positive advertising, and student recruitment. As higher education institutions increase the number of fully online programs, it is important to ensure that students feel a sense of connectedness to the university. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a correlation between non-traditional, online, undergraduate students' sense of connectedness to their college and their subsequent interest in alumni participation after graduation. This research provides information that would fill a gap in the literature on the correlation between perceptions of identity when related to a university that they attended completely online as a non-traditional student and its impact on their interest in alumni participation. The non-traditional graduate sample (N=110) provided a population from which to collect data by the use of two online surveys, the Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) and the Alumni Interest Survey (AIS), sent out by email through the university alumni association. Pearson Product-Moment was conducted to determine if a correlation existed between online graduates' sense of connectedness to their institution and their subsequent interest in alumni participation. Further, the sample was then looked at from a gender perspective to determine if there was a difference between males and females. All three hypotheses were found to have a statistically significant correlation. Recommendations for future research are to determine if the same results are true at non-religious based universities who also offer completely online degree programs, as well as conducting a qualitative study to determine what non-traditional online students are looking for from their university alumni association participation.

Keywords: Non-traditional students, online education, alumni participation, organizational identity, undergraduate education.

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List of Abbreviations

Alumni Involvement Survey (AIS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS)

Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)

Southeastern University – Pseudonym (SU)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The average age of students in American higher education institutions is rising. According to Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow (2016) a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) showed that non-traditional students comprised a growing population of higher education enrollments. Non-traditional students comprised 12% of all full-time four-year undergraduate public university students, 13% of full-time four-year private non-profit undergraduate students, and 70% of all four-year undergraduate for-profit students in 2013. Additionally, the report showed that non-traditional students were the largest enrollments as part-time students with 48% as undergraduate in public four-year institutions, 64% at private non-profit four-year institutions, and 78% at private for-profit four-year institutions. Non-traditional students are those who are over the age of 25 because they are older than the traditional 18-24 age range of students who attend college right out of high school (Bell, 2012). Not only are large numbers of non-traditional aged students participating in higher education, but are expected to increase. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that between 2011 and 2021 there will be a 14 percent increase of non-traditional students in colleges and universities, making them the majority in higher education (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016).

Because many non-traditional learners are often balancing life, family, and work responsibilities, many are opting to receive their education in an online format. Online education is increasing in the United States, and according to Lynch and James (2012), online education is a growing global trend. Because of this growing global trend, many colleges are now offering entire degree programs available to complete online without any need for on-campus attendance.

As universities are discovering, this option is very appealing to the non-traditional learner and is profitable for the institution as well. In a study conducted by Deming, Goldin, Katz, and Yuchtman (2015), between the years 2006 and 2013, full-time online education tuition decreased by 34 percent. In the same period, four-year, public colleges increased tuition by 9.2 percent. Deming et al., (2013) research further indicate that it is more cost-efficient to offer online classes than traditional classes. Increasing online classes allow universities to reduce their overhead when the high-cost additional buildings are no longer present.

While governmental funding is decreasing in higher education, colleges and universities are forced to find ways to subsidize their financial needs (Phillip & Olson, 2015). One of the ways that universities have done this successfully has been through alumni contributions. Alumni contributions can mean financial donations but can also include contributions of time at functions, positive word of mouth for advertising purposes and recruitment (Barron, 2015). For alumni to have a desire to participate in these activities, they must first have a strong sense of connectedness to the university, otherwise known as organizational identity (Stephenson & Bell, 2014).

As more colleges and universities offer online courses and degree options, as well as experience an increase in non-traditional student populations, higher education institutions need to find new ways to engage this demographic. A study by Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak, and Killion (2012) indicate that higher education institutions need to be intentional about designing online programs that include the emotions and learning processes of non-traditional students. A study conducted by O'Shea, Stone, and Delahunty (2015) stated that it is often the little things about a learning environment that can have the largest positive impact. Thus indicating that we cannot assume that the same ways of engaging traditional students is transferrable to non-traditional,

online students. Rather the non-traditional, online student may have different needs that higher education institutions should address to develop the same level of connectedness with this student population. As online options continue to grow in availability within higher education, it is important to remember that the teacher-student interaction is still important and linked to overall student satisfaction and success (Haley & Booker, 2012).

As non-traditional students increase in the overall student population of higher education institutions, it is imperative that tools be in place to ensure personal and academic success. It is not sufficient for institutions to expect non-traditional learners to conform to the status quo, but instead, design programs to meet their needs. It is important that the university culture is one that develops an adult students' success. When students do not have a sense that they have acceptance in the current culture, their personal identity is affected (Kasworm, 2010). According to Ashford and Mael (1989), organizational identity is an individual's sense of belonging or identification with a group or organization. Determining if students will graduate with a positive personal identity or a negative personal identity to their university is due in large part to the cultural climate of the institution. When ensuring that adult learners succeed in higher education, it is important to note that there are very specific things that adult learners are looking for in a learning situation. For adult learners to have a sense of investment and satisfaction in their learning experiences, higher education institutions must address their specific needs. Ideas for suggestion were removing enrollment barriers, access to important offices during non-typical hours, flexibility, and an education approach that is relevant to non-traditional students field of study. When these aspects are a part of non-traditional students' learning process, they will have a stronger sense of commitment and value (Connell, 2011).

Gender can influence student outcomes when returning to college. Some areas identified are personal perceptions as well as social norms that can create conflict and guilt when returning to school (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Stone & O'Shea, 2013; Windoff, 1999). Additionally, studies have identified a variety of differences on social identity factors and successful learning experiences between men and women in online learning environments (Ashong & Commander, 2012, Huang, Hood & Yoo, 2013; Hwang, 2010). These learning differences between gender combined with the link between connectedness to an institution and alumni involvement by Stephenson and Yerger (2014), it is important to determine if gender plays a part in the correlation between organizational identity to the higher education institution and alumni involvement post-graduation.

Higher education institutions have depended on alumni for everything from financial support, to scholarships, to recruitment, and even brand awareness by wearing University logo items over the years. The impact that an active and supportive alumni association can offer an institution is limitless. There is much research available on the types of people who give to universities, the predictors of who will donate, and the desire of alumni. However, there is little research available about how the non-traditional online student will affect the future of higher education alumni associations (McDearmon, 2010; Newman & Petrosko, 2011; Skari, 2014). As the number of non-traditional and online student populations grow, it is important that alumni associations have a better understanding of the value these students bring to their organization. It is also important to know what they are looking for from their alma mater. Universities will need to determine the specific needs of non-traditional online graduates, in order to encourage them to participate in alumni association activities. When institutions focus on this alumni programs can have a stronger focus on the needs of all students, and more specifically, the non-

traditional online graduate (Barron, 2015). When potential participants feel that there is a genuine benefit to participation through give and take, it strengthens the relationship by utilizing the social identity theory (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). The development of social identity theory, as well as exchange theory model, are part of the personal development of an individual. This process helps people to connect with the individuals around them through organizational connections and the satisfaction of supporting something with which they have a strong belief (Tajfel, 1979; Emerson, 1976).

Exchange theory has its basis on the exchange that takes place between individuals. A study by Jakobsen and Anderson (2013), identified that exchange theory impacts an individual's sense of connectedness to an organization and the interest in participation. A person's desire to take part in a relationship that includes both giving and receiving is what drives interest in alumni activities. An individual's level of exchange identifies their level of participation and involvement (Ekeh, 1969; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958). Social exchange theory is a "reward" and the transfer of such rewards within human relationships (Burns, 1973). The second theory that applies to this study is that of social identity. Social identity theory is the connection that one feels to an organization that they belong and share an emotional connection or significance that connects them to others in the same organization (Rodrigues, 2011). Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994) indicated that people who have a strong sense of social identity to a group or organization begin to see themselves less by their individual differences and more by their shared membership in that group. This definition is a classic example of an alumni association model and the potential strength of that partnership. The connection that people feel to an organization is largely due to the shared positive experience that they had or have in association with that organization. The social exchange comes into play when the

organization provides a sense of belonging and acceptance and in exchange for the individuals' membership in the group (Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994). From an alumni standpoint, participants who have a positive association with their alma mater in which they have a secure connection will provide in exchange, their positive feedback, advertising, and monetary benefits (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). As identified here, both the theories of exchange and social identity play a substantial role in organizational identity and alumni participation, which are key elements of this research.

Problem Statement

Typically, alumni organization origins in higher education institutions focus on the traditional student who had an on-campus experience with the university. With the increase of non-traditional student enrollment in higher education as well as the increase of entirely online degrees, there is a large demographic of student that has not had a typical college experience. The growing non-traditional alumni population has different interests than that of the traditional alumni association offerings (Whitby, 2014). Much research is available on traditional college students and their level of organizational identity to their institution. Research such as that carried out by Love (2013) indicated that traditional students in a business administration degree had differences in their level of organizational commitment to their institution based on their belief that they could complete their degree or educational goals without barriers. However, this study only focused on students who were of traditional age and enrolled in a traditional educational environment. Likewise, Jussila, Byrne, and Tuominen (2012) identified what is involved in an individual's decision to stay a part of an organization based on his/her level of organizational identity, but this study does not directly look at the demographic of the online, non-traditional, undergraduate college student. According to Li (2013), universities that invest

in providing high-quality student experiences see higher student satisfaction numbers, which result in the alumni's willingness to recruit students. Predictors for alumni participation as well as social media methods for engaging alumni, but once again, no research is available that focuses on online, non-traditional, undergraduate student population (Newman & Petrosko, 2011; Farrow & Yuan, 2011). It is important to provide alumni with ways to continue to grow and develop even after graduation to include networking opportunities that will meet their personal and professional needs as well as those of the institution. When schools invest in student support even after graduation, this can encourage graduates to contribute to their alma mater in ways such as positive branding, word-of-mouth and financial support (Crisp, 2013).

Crisp (2013) indicates that there are differences in what alumni want from their alma mater after graduation, and it stands to reason that the online, non-traditional, undergraduate student may have specific desires as well. The problem is that there is little research on what an online, non-traditional, undergraduate student is seeking from an alumni association (Whitby, 2014). There is a lot of research available on students' sense of connectedness to their universities, as well as reasons for and indicators of alumni participation (Houlihan, 2013; Moore, 2014; Smith, Erlam, Quirke & Sylvester, 2014; Walcott, 2015). However, there has been limited research linking the two factors and looking for correlations. Due to the increased online population in higher education, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the online, non-traditional, undergraduate student group's sense of organizational connectedness to their institution while they are students and their alumni involvement after graduation (Whitby, 2014). In an article by Han (2014) the increased availability of higher education in traditional and online, public and private, non-profit and for-profit options, combined with the decrease in state funding to institutions, competition for students as increased. According to Hiltonsmith and

Draut (2014), public colleges and universities in 2012 generated 44% of their operating expenses from student tuition, which was a 20% increase in 25 years. This competition factor has created an environment where higher education institutions must utilize all necessary means to draw new students. This draw for students benefits the institution as well as ensures the economic development of a community, a state, and a nation. The growing enrollment in online education identifies a need to ensure that the online student population has a connectedness level that would create a potential recruitment mentality in their area of influence post-graduation.

It is also important to determine if gender plays a role in the learning experience and subsequent connectedness to an institution. Research is divided on how different genders respond to online education. In a studies by Kay (2009) and Tsai and Tsai (2010) it was determined that men feel more positively about computers and online learning than female students. However, in a study by Johnson (2011) it was determined that women have stronger online communication interactions which led to more meaningful interactions in their online courses. Hwang (2010) conducted a study that identified higher levels of social identity and perceived enjoyment of online learning. In yet another study, it was determined that gender identified no significant effect on attitudes in regards to online learning. The inconsistent outcomes of these studies on gender differences in online learning make it important to factor gender into this research.

Alumni participation is not merely a one-sided relationship for higher education institutions, as developing post-graduation relationships with alumni provides opportunity for institutions to assist in the continued development of their graduates (Osborn, Alkezweeny, and Kecskes, 2015). Boyte (2013) reported the idea of developing the social conscience of alumni by viewing alumni as “public workers,” and Ellison (2015) recognized that many alumni seek to

go beyond the typical alumni “feel good pay-off” and desire to do more. According to Osborn, Alkezweeny, and Kecskes (2015), Portland State University in 2012 recognized the need for transitioning student engagement to alumni engagement after graduation. Their extensive alumni reconstruct created a post-graduation alumni plan that included workshops to extend the mentality of engagement through means such as civic responsibility and leadership. Because of this initiative, Portland State University created a platform to identify and develop their alumni in this way. Wintsel and Gazley (2015) recognize that alumni seek a reciprocal relationship with their institution in the form of networking support, access to student and alumni talent, as well as opportunities to reconnect with their active college experience. While alumni associations offer additional benefits to those individuals who pay for alumni membership, it is important that it remain reciprocal outside of the financial realm. For alumni associations to maintain their effectiveness, they will need to ensure that they are identifying and meeting the needs of all student groups (Johnson, 2013). If the online, non-traditional, student population at universities maintain or increase their current numbers, it will be necessary to identify the needs of these graduates and adapt alumni programs to meet these needs. The problem is that it is unknown if non-traditional students who complete undergraduate degrees in an entirely online program have a strong enough sense of connectedness to their alma mater to have an interest in participating in alumni programs after graduation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this non-experimental correlational study was to determine if there was a significant relationship between non-traditional, online, undergraduate students’ level of organizational identity to their alma mater and their interest in participating in alumni programs. Additionally, the study sought to determine if gender had any impact on the correlation. The

predictor variable, organizational identity level of non-traditional, online, undergraduate students, is the students' level of connectedness to their institution. The definition of social connectedness to an institution is the sense of closeness and belonging of an individual to a social network (institution) that improves their mental health and well-being (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010). The idea of connectedness has been linked in several studies to the overall college experience and post-graduation behaviors (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2010; Hong & Yang, 2009; Stephenson & Yerger, 2014). The criterion variable is the individual's interest level in alumni programs after graduation. This interest level is determined by self-reporting responses on the alumni interest survey. This survey looks at current as well as interest level of future involvement in alumni activities. The relationship between connectedness and alumni participation according to Stephenson and Yerger (2014) shows that students who have a strong sense of belonging to their institution would positively influence positive alumni behaviors. It is also important to determine if gender plays a role in the learning experience and subsequent connectedness to an institution. Research is divided on how different genders respond to online education. With studies stating men have higher levels in some cases, women in others, and some determining that there is no significant difference (Kay, 2009; Tsai & Tsai, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Nistor, 2013). The inconsistent outcomes of these studies on gender differences in online learning make it important to factor gender into this research. The population was a random sample of individuals who started their completely online degree program at the age of 25 years or older. The alumni association using university data identified the population. The alumni association representative used random selection to elicit participants in blocks of 2,000 per mailing, and additional blocks received mailings until the responses reached the target goal of 120.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to determine if non-traditional students who completed their undergraduate degree in a completely online program have developed a strong sense of connectedness to their institution. Additionally, the study seeks to understand if there is a correlation between that connectedness level and the subsequent interest in alumni involvement after graduation. This information is important for higher education as federal funding decreases, and the need to maximize existing alumni populations to provide support in enrollment generating activities that ensure the successful advancement of the institution. Several studies on traditional aged undergraduate students who attended a brick mortar school have identified that a student's sense of connectedness can directly influence their interest in alumni involvement (Smith, Erlam, Quirke, & Sylvester, 2014; Stevenson & Yerger, 2014; Whitby, 2014). However, with the growing numbers of non-traditional online students attending higher education institutions today, it is important to determine if this student population have similar correlations between organizational identity and alumni involvement. In doing so, institutions can maximize their alumni potential in the area of advertising, recruitment, and financial sponsorship to assist in university advancement with this growing student population. Because non-traditional student populations are relatively new to higher education in the volume that we see today, there have been very few studies conducted to determine what, if any, level of connectedness to the university exists for these students, as well as their involvement in alumni activities after they complete their degree. When the completely online factor is included, there is even less research to provide insight into the organizational identity and connectedness of this population as well as their interest in alumni participation when their degree is completed. This research can provide valuable information to higher education institutions on the correlation

between student sense of connectedness and alumni involvement interest of the non-traditional, online student population that attends college today, and assist them in making important future decisions on how to ensure online students can become connected on a personal level to their university. This information can be applied to alumni associations in their work to increase the likelihood of non-traditional graduates becoming actively involved alumni that promote the advancement of the institution, and potentially provide additional financial support to their alma mater.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university?

Null Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for this study are:

H₀1: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀2: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀3: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university.

Definitions

The following definitions provide clarity on the vocabulary used throughout this study.

1. *Alumni Association* – An organization that connects former students to their alma mater, provides services to them that they find valuable, and supports the university’s mission (Penn State Alumni Association, 2005).
2. *Alumni Participation* – Typically viewed as monetary giving to the organization; however, this also includes recruitment, promoting the university, and branding the university logo (Gaier, 2005).
3. *Non-traditional Learner* – Someone whose age or social situation defines them as adults. In an educational environment, typically this includes students age 25 or higher (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).
4. *Online Learning* – Learning that takes place completely in an internet-based environment that does not include face-to-face meetings with faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2010b).
5. *Organizational Identity* – An individual’s sense of belonging or identification with a group or organization (Ashford & Mael, 1989).

6. *Social Connectedness* - The sense of closeness and belonging of an individual to a social network (institution) that improves their mental health and well-being (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Governmental funding to higher education institutions has decreased significantly in recent years, making the importance of additional financial funding through alternate means more important than ever before (Bernal & Mills, 2013; Newman & Petrosko, 2011; Skari, 2014). As educational costs increase and governmental funding decreases, higher education institutions must seek new ways to increase their available monetary resources. Although Kelderman (2013) indicated that during the 2012-2013 fiscal year, 30 states increased appropriations to higher education for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, there was a growing demand from state governments to higher education institutions to find new ways to operate more cost-effectively and decrease exorbitant costs to students. This mandate from state governments is in response to the growing amount of debt that college students are accumulating in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Traditionally, institutions have relied on voluntary donations, often from alumni, to help subsidize their funding that they currently receive from the government, and tuition (Dolbert, 2002; Farrow & Yuan, 2011). However, as Newman and Petrosko (2011) point out, alumni giving is also showing a decline. There has been much research conducted on how to predict alumni participation and donation (Lertputtarak & Sapitchayangkool, 2014; Newman & Petrosko, 2011; Skari, 2014), there is less research on other forms of alumni participation aside from monetary donations. These alternative alumni participation functions could include things such as word-of-mouth recruitment, promoting the university through the wearing of branded items, or participating in alumni activities. One such study of this nature by Weerts, Cabrera, and Sanford (2010) identified recruiting students, mentoring alumni, and participating in special events as additional ways for alumni to participate. One segment of higher education

where there is no research available on alumni participation on any level is the non-traditional student who took part in an entirely online degree program.

As the demand for online education increases and more institutions include this form of educational format to their learning options, universities and alumni associations will have to re-think their approach to reaching graduates, to include the online, non-traditional demographic of alumni. The traditional college experience and sense of nostalgia that has a direct link to a campus experience will no longer apply, and a new approach to developing alumni involvement will be necessary. As we continue to see non-traditional, online student numbers grow and begin to outnumber traditional campus attending students enrolled in higher education, it will be important for alumni administrators to understand this population. As part of that understanding, they will need to determine if the non-traditional online students are interested in alumni activities, and if so, what can the alumni organization do to engage them? It is clear that a strong sense of organizational identity is an important factor in the continued successfulness of individual institutions. We must ensure that all alumni have an opportunity to develop a feeling of connectedness to their alma mater and have the ability to participate in a variety of alumni activities to promote and advance their alma mater moving forward.

Theoretical Framework

University connectedness and alumni association participation are, at their very core, an exchange between individuals. Social exchange theory states that the exchange process (Ekeh, 1969; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958) can influence the involvement level and success in alumni groups with non-traditional, college students who have received their degrees in an online learning environment. We do not recognize social exchange as a phenomenon in our society because it is so much a part of our culture. Western culture is conducted through a process of

exchange from one person to another, which we see in both formal relationships as well as personal ones (Ekeh, 1969). An example of a formal relationship could be alumni associations and their membership. Alumni organizations, on the surface, look to be rather one-sided in their exchange. The alumni association benefits from the monetary and possibly the altruistic participation of its members but provides few resources of value in return to the members. In an exchange situation, the costs and rewards for the individual members may be different, but there still must be a sense that the costs and rewards are equal in value to the members to make it worth continuing (Homans, 1958). It is this concept of equality in reward over the cost that many higher education alumni associations miss in dealing with their alumni members.

For higher education institutions to understand what reward would equalize the alumni member, they must seek to determine what the members want from their alumni association in return for their financial and personal support. Fairness and distributive justice (Homans, 1958) describes the idea of knowing what individuals want from organizational association and how they can work to meet the individual participants needs, which can include alumni associations. This concept is also necessary for continued support and participation among groups. One way that alumni associations can provide this sense of fairness is through connecting members of the group for networking purposes. Exchange network structures within a group allow all members to feel as though they are contributing as well as receiving. The sense of giving and taking relates to individual exchange relations that lead to the development of exchange networks (Emerson, 1976). One area of social exchange theory that Ekeh (1974) excludes from the otherwise utilitarian approach to social exchange is that of gift giving. In this case, Ekeh feels that it is important that the flow of reciprocity not exist, as it could discourage an imperative aspect of social exchange in which individuals give with no regard for return. Blau (1964) refers

to a similar group as virtual saints who with for others selflessly and without any thought for what they will receive in return.

This selfless giving approach to social exchange theory is important because even though the individual who receives the act does not exchange with the giver, the giver still receives personal satisfaction from the giving alone. While this type of exchange is prevalent in our society, social exchange theory indicates that without any exchange between individuals, the relationship will eventually dissolve as the giving individual feels as though they are not valued. Thus, it is important in any successful social exchange situation that all parties are benefiting from a mutual sense of benefit, and when this happens, the participants are much more likely to participate on a long-term basis.

Alumni associations and the sense of personal attachment and connectedness to a particular university or college that students and graduates feel are examples of social identity theory. Because many of the early writings on social identity theory had a focus on understanding discrimination and prejudices of one group towards another (Tajfel, 1969), it tends to have a negative connotation. However, there are very positive aspects to having a strong sense of belonging to a specific group or organization, and we can see these similarities in university supporters. Tajfel (1969) identified that much of what takes place in an individual's life is directly related to the activities and groups to which we belong. This connection and identification to a group are evident in the rivalries we see between opposing universities. Loyalties are clearly divided into many states in America based on individuals' allegiance or preference for one university over another. It is a phenomenon we see at sporting events, in the purchasing and wearing of branded clothing, and the jokes that are understood about one to the other. Many cases of social identity create a means by which people categorize themselves

based on their identification with different groups or classifications (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). These labels have an association with University allegiance, in an “us” vs. “them” mentality. Tajfel (1969) identified that the less we know specifically about an individual, the more we tend to associate them with the generalities that we do know about them.

Identifying that when we have little information other than an association of membership to a group, we make assumptions about other people. While these assumptions can often lead to misconceptions, and even isolate individuals from potential relationships, they also build a positive bond with the group to which people belong or identify.

Social identity must be a part of the process if we are to have a successful alumni association and ensure that alumni have a strong sense of belonging with their alma mater. When individuals identify themselves with a specific role, they do not typically do so based on complete uniformity with a group, but rather, a sense of interconnectedness that is unique due to their association with the panel (Stets & Burke, 2000). The presence of group identification is when a person stops seeing themselves as an individual with differences from the person standing beside them and instead sees themselves as interchangeable or similar based on their association with a group or organization (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). This type of comradery and collective team mentality is necessary for alumni to feel towards their alma mater to truly be effective as an alumni association member. Being a member of, or identifying with a group, helps the cognitive functioning of an individual to give them a sense of identity and belonging (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Stets & Burke, 2000). Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994) state that we as individuals are conduits that groups can develop through social relationships and will impact how we function as an individual moving forward. In other words, while we are very different people, our identification with a group helps us to develop

relationships that we might not engage in any other way, the identification creates a bridge for us. This sense of belonging and group identity has a link to self-esteem and positive social identity (Tajfel, 1969) to help individuals have a stronger sense of who they are. One researcher went as far as to determine that being a part of, or being associated with a group, has a positive impact on personal self-esteem (Trepte, 2006). Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979) go on to say that while self-esteem can be affected by association with a group, it is important that the person is satisfied that the group is one that has positive aspects. According to Tajfel (1969), an increased sense of connectedness to a group happens when the group gives some benefit to the individual's social identity. This idea of satisfaction links well with the concept of social exchange theory and would be especially true in alumni association membership, as alumni would need to have had a positive experience at the university to want to have an association with that group. To develop an environment where alumni to want to identify with their alma mater as a higher education institution, they must feel that there has been a valuable exchange of interest on both parts.

Social exchange theory and social identity theory have a link to the interactions and identification of individuals in group settings. Both of which at the very core are examples of alumni associations for higher education institutions. The outcomes of a well-developed alumni association program could lead to strengthening the impact of both the social exchange and social identity theory of its participants. The building of alumni members' social identity and social exchange happens when building the members sense of identity with a group of individuals who have shared experiences and an affinity to their alma mater as well as having a sense of shared exchange in the organization through a give and receive process. The important factor to remember in both of these theories, however, is that if the alumni program is not

designed to benefit both the higher education institution and the individual graduate, it can have a counter effect that will decrease alumni participation rather than build it. It is for this reason that the programs must have a careful and precise design. The social identity theory process diagram is in Figure 1.

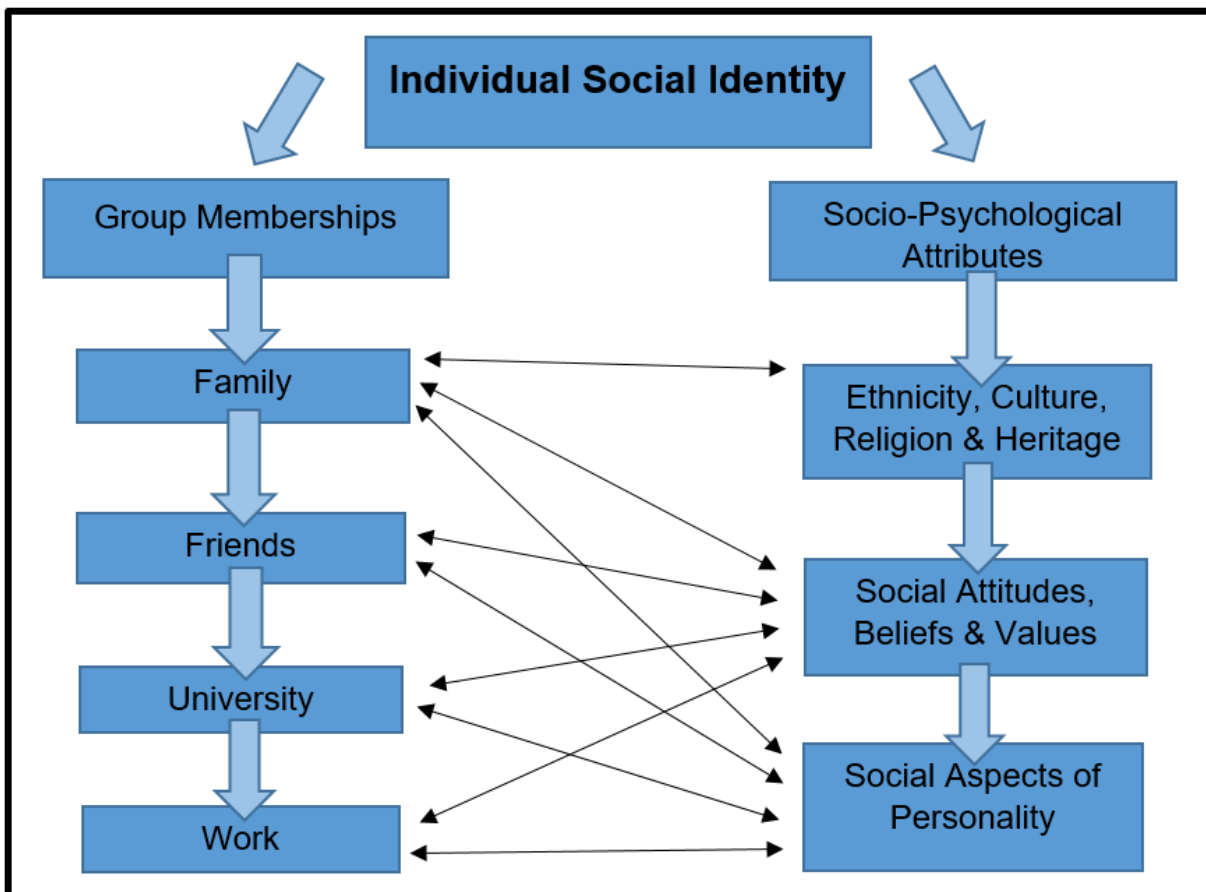


Figure 1. Social Identity Theory. This figure shows the impact of memberships on the social identity of an individual.

Literature Review

Online Education

The newest and most pronounced trend in higher education is the option of taking courses, as well as completing entire degree programs, in an online environment where no

classroom seat time is necessary. This trend is not only growing across the nation but is quickly becoming a norm for most higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2010a; Castle & McGuire, 2010; Dziuban & Moskal, 2011; Xu & Jaggars, 2010). As this trend grows and finds a strong position in higher education, it will have a large impact on education as a whole. The impact could be range from monetary, to completion rates, to identification to the institution that use to be a natural process in the traditional education experience that we are used to in the United States.

Part of the appeal for online learning is the amount of flexibility and convenience that it offers those who participate. Having the ability to complete higher education courses devoid of time or location provides a flexibility that traditional face-to-face classes cannot. Landry, Griffeth, and Hartman (2006) contend that the online learning environment offers students a level of anonymity that could help them feel more comfortable in initiating conversations with their instructors. This perceived level of comfort could potentially encourage greater participation in the learning process. According to Nunez and Alamin (1998), 30% of all college students come from working-class families or backgrounds. Because of their personal history, it is also more likely that these students will have to work while attending college to pay for their expenses, and therefore need a more flexible educational option. These circumstances alone could increase the student's perception of online education beyond that of a student who did not have the same personal needs and challenges when attending college. For this reason, Albert and Johnson (2011) suggest that universities focus their online education marketing campaigns toward students who are from a working-class socioeconomic background as their perceptions of the online experience going into it will be at a higher level.

While online learning is available in nearly every higher education institution today, there still seems to be a general lack of consensus on its effectiveness. In a survey conducted by Pew Research Center (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011), both college presidents and the public responded to the value of online learning. Only 29% of the public participants indicated that they felt online courses were equal in value to a face-to-face course; however, 51% of the college and university presidents surveyed felt that online courses offered students an equal learning value to that of the traditional classroom. This difference in common belief between the two groups supports the idea that many outside of higher education are still not convinced that online course offerings are at the same level of excellence as traditional courses, and is perpetuating the idea that online education is somehow inadequate in quality. However, in a study conducted by Lim, Morris, and Kupritz (2007), the difference between students' perceived and actual learning showed significant increases in an online learning environment. A U. S. Department of Education (2009) study substantiated the perceived and actual learning in online education when the report showed that students who participate in online courses perform better than those in face-to-face classrooms. These studies show that online education is effective, and yet somehow it has not been accepted as such by the general population.

Some ideas on why online education is producing high results with students have a direct link to the types of learning that take place. A study by Williams, Matt, and O'Reilly (2014) looked at higher education, online student learning styles from a generational perspective. The results of the Williams, Matt and O'Reilly study indicated that it is the implementation of online programs that are the key to student success, and can impact outcomes across all generational lines. The thoughtful application is necessary for assisting higher education instructors with their transition into online instruction and will make this learning option more fruitful and meaningful

to the participants. Thus, when online class options are in the creative state, it must have a different approach than simply taking traditional course content and placing it online for students to access. Rather, the content must be developed differently to fit in the online space and meet the learning needs of the online student. Some studies have shown that collaborative projects completed online produce a higher level of satisfaction and learning than those collaborative projects completed in a traditional classroom setting (Guuawardena, Nola, Wilson, Lopez-Islas, Ramirez-Angel, & Megchun-Alpizar, 2001; Jung, Choi, Lim, & Leem, 2002). A study on the asynchronous approach to online learning identified that it allows students more time to think critically and reflect on the topics they are learning to increase their engagement in the overall learning experience (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010).

According to a study by Parker, Lenhart, and Moore (2011), 77% of American colleges and universities are offering online classes to their student population. The leader of these being the two-year colleges at 91% and public four-year institutions close behind at 89%. Of the universities that offer online courses to their students, 58% offer degrees available entirely online. Of the college graduates that have taken online classes, 15% have earned the degree entirely online (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011). More recently, however, according to Allen and Seaman (2013), the number of students taking at least one online course has increased by over 570,000 for a total of 6.7 million, which equated to 32% of all college students enrolled in higher education. These numbers show the growth that online education is experiencing, and with the constant increase of technology, we can only anticipate that these figures will grow to a point where every student enrolled in higher education could be taking at least one class in an online format. We can also anticipate that more completely online degree options will become available in the next few years to meet the demand for higher education on a flexible schedule.

Despite the increased use of online education, there is still debates being conducted to determine this learning formats effectiveness. Studies have been carried out using outcomes that support the effectiveness of online learning, while others state that it is not as effective as learning in the traditional classroom (Stewart, Bachman, & Johnson, 2010). The Parker, Lenhart, and Moore (2011) study also indicated that most college presidents feel the number of students taking online courses will increase to the point where online courses will be the majority within the next ten years. The economic impact of online learning has been substantial for higher education. The State of Online Learning report for 2009 showed that 66% of institutions reported an increase in demand for new courses offered in an online format, as well as a 73% increase in demand for existing online courses and programs (Allen & Seaman, 2010b). According to Tallent-Runnels et al., (2006), the current growth rate of online course offerings in colleges and universities in the United States is about 33% per year. The more significant factor, however, is that the growth trends for online education are increasing steadily and are exceeding the growth rates in overall higher education student enrollment numbers (Allen & Seaman, 2010a). The Sloan Consortium study identified that in the United States alone, in the fall semester of 2010, over 6 million students were participating in at least one online course. According to Allen and Seaman (2011), more than two-thirds of higher education institution presidents or CEOs see online course offerings and programs as strategically important to their college or university. However, only about half of these administrators include online programs in their annual strategic planning for the university. This lack of long-range planning for online program offerings is a telling indicator that while the demand for online education increases and the learning experience has been found to be equal in quality, there is still a slow transition to provide necessary funding towards online education to ensure it has proper development.

One of the characteristics for ensuring a student has a positive experience in their classwork is when they feel engaged. Engagement is the level of emotional interest and its direct correlation to the resulting attitude; thus, students who have a high sense of identification or interest will have positive attitudes about the learning process (Pellas, 2014). A study by Bradford and Wyatt (2010) showed that academic standing and ethnicity of the student do not impact the engagement and satisfaction with online courses. Another study found that when the learning process is created to engage the learner with tasks that have meaning and value, the student's engagement levels will increase above those who are completing tasks that seem like busy work. This focus on instruction with meaning and the real-world application will in turn increase students' sense of connectedness to the course and ultimately their dedication to complete their degree (Young & Bruce, 2011). The more involvement that a student has in the learning process online, the greater their future participation in the course activities (Meyer, 2014). The need for student participation gained support from the results of a study by Pellas (2014) that indicated motivational beliefs positively linked to cognitive and emotional engagement factors of the student. This link determines that motivational beliefs can have an impact on a student's full participation in online courses and could potentially have implications in other areas as well. In the study by Shah, Goode, West, and Clark (2014), the results indicated that adult students often see online education as a means to add another layer to their already busy lives while getting an education at the same time. While this is a great testament to the need for online education, it does not indicate if it is the most efficient way for these learners to gain necessary knowledge or if they will be satisfied with the process.

Perception is important in the human psyche, and it is true in online education as well. Student perceptions vary on the success of an online learning experience, and its comparison to

the traditional model (Tanner, Noser, & Totaro, 2009). Students' perceived satisfaction with online learning experiences and their actual performance provides useful information about whether online learning can be a successful way for them to advance academically (Castle & McGuire, 2010; Zhu, 2012). The Dziuban and Moskal (2011) study determined that student satisfaction results for end-of-course surveys show no difference between online, blended, or face-to-face styles of presentation. This lack of differentiation indicates that students do not consider the mode of information presentation as a determining variable when evaluating their perceived success in a course. Instead, in a study by Wang, Dziuban, Cook, and Moskal (2009), the research showed that there were three predictors that student's use to rate a successful course: facilitation of learning, communication of ideas and information, and instructor interest in student learning. These predictors were found to be the same for online, traditional face-to-face and blended courses, thus further validating the concept that the format used for the presentation of information does not influence students' perceived or actual success. Confirming this belief that the mode of presentation does not change the students' predictor of achievement, McPhee and Soderstrom (2012) showed no significant difference between the method of learning and the grades that were received, indicating that online learning is equally as effective as the traditional classroom. Nearly two-thirds of higher education academic leaders feel that student satisfaction is the same for online as it is for traditional classroom instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2011). This sense of satisfaction may have a link to the flexibility and availability of education that makes learning more accessible and more individualized to the student. If older students can be successful in online courses, it can be more beneficial to them due to the flexibility that is necessary for working adults to complete their degrees while still maintaining their other obligations (Castle & McGuire, 2010; Hyllegard, Deng & Carla, 2008).

Online education is a growing option for many students in higher education and one that continues to attract scores of students, as well as institutions that consider it a viable alternative to the traditional classroom. The literature indicates that this trend toward online education will continue to grow in popularity as both non-traditional and traditional students migrate towards this class format for its flexibility and convenience to fit their specific needs. While the reasons for taking online classes may differ for a non-traditional student and a traditional student, the attraction is still present for both student demographics. It is important for higher education institutions to continue to develop and refine their online offerings in a manner that will include student connectedness to the class, their peers and professors, and their institution. In doing so, online class participation can develop a student's sense of connectedness to the process of which they are a part. This connectedness will in turn help to increase course and degree completion for the student and ultimately improve their future.

Gender and Online Learning

While the importance of online education has support in the literature, as well as student's attitudes towards the online learning model, it is also important to determine if this format of learning can be beneficial to both male and female students. For this reason, it is important to look at the perceptions and research related to gender and the online learning experience. Additionally, traditional gender roles associated with societal norms in America can also contribute to educational performance. According to studies by Marandet and Wainwright (2010) and Stone and O'Shea (2013) women often deal with great amounts of conflict when returning to school and feel their educational goals are selfish and take them away from their traditional role. The strong emotional conflict described can cause female students to deal with extreme feelings of guilt. These traditional role issues related to gender can affect student

performance primarily in women. The idea of guilt in taking away from other responsibilities is less evident in male adult students as the study by Windoff (1999) indicated that less than 10% of the men who participated in the survey felt that parenting or childcare was an issue in their educational pursuits.

Students' perceptions of online learning can be influenced by gender, with some research indicating that males feel more positively about, and have more experience with, computers and online learning than their female counterparts (Kay, 2009; Tsai & Tsai, 2010). However, this is contrary to research by Ramirez-Correa, Arenas-Gaitan, and Rondan-Cataluna (2015) when they identified that when considering gender females scored higher than males in the areas of perceived ease of use, the perception of external control, behavioral intention and use. While research by Tsai and Tsai (2010) also discovered a gender outcome that does not support that of other research when it noted that males did have a stronger sense of comfort with using computers, however, it also determined that female participants be more communication-oriented, and therefore, had stronger online interactions than males. Because women have stronger online communication interactions, they also had more powerful and meaningful experiences than men and were more satisfied with the overall online learning environment (Johnson, 2011). In a study conducted by Chan et al., (2013) females participated at a higher level in educational online social networks, such as discussion boards. The level of their participation was evident in the depth of the posts they shared with their classmates, as well as the number of times they contributed. Once again identifying female participants developed stronger connections throughout the learning process. While this study did acknowledge that male and female students reacted differently to online social environments, they were able to do so collaboratively that did not appear to be detrimental to either gender (Chan et al., 2013).

According to research conducted by Hwang (2010) women showed a stronger outcome in the areas of social identity on identification as well as perceived enjoyment in online activities related to email and discussion board posts. Additionally, the research identified that the willingness to share information by email can improve when an individual has more development in the area of social and self-identity, when considering gender. Once again, this research identified the unique differences between males and females when stating that men communicate more with a focus on their personal social status, while women focus more on creating relationships and social inclusion.

In a study conducted by Gonzalez-Gomez, Guardiola, Rodriguez, and Alonso (2012), the greatest area of difference in gender and online learning is in the field of education methods and teacher value. First, in the area of teaching methods, it was determined that female students placed a greater importance on planning and participation with the subject matter while males were not concerned with these. Instead, male students were much more concerned than females with the pacing of the class and materials. In the area of teacher value, female students found the contributions of tutors to be an important aspect of the teaching value process, while male students did not. The study went on to determine that female students utilized tutors much more frequently than they utilized male students. In comparison, a survey conducted by Nistor (2013) showed that gender had no significant effect on the attitudes of online learning, which does not support previous findings (Gonzalez-Gomez, Guardiola, Rodriguez, & Alonso, 2012). In a study conducted by Zaidi, Verstegen, Naqvi, Morahan, and Dornan (2016) the idea of gender in online education was looked at from a social norms perspective. This study consisted of in-depth conversations that identified how social standards determined by society or culture could impact online learning. While gender-related social norms in the United States may not be as

predominant as in other cultures, the possibility of socially expected gender roles may still be a factor in how individuals participate within an online learning environment. These perceived gender expectations are especially true when considering the United States has a very diverse cultural blend of individuals who may approach the online learning experience from different perspectives based on their cross-cultural backgrounds. Additionally, in a study by Huang, Hood, and Yoo (2013) identify female participants have more anxiety toward using technology. However, the researchers determined this to be a result of gender stereotypes that exist in our culture and females accept at a very young age.

This literature implies that there are vast differences in what male and female students determine as significant to their online, educational success, but it does not address if both male and female students are successful. Ashong and Commander (2012) conducted a study with both men and women to measure any potential differences related to nine subscales associated with learning. The research indicated that all participants had very high positive perceptions of their online learning experience. The study goes on to state that females scored significantly higher in five of the nine subscales than male participants. These five areas were teacher support, student interaction and collaboration, personal relevance, authentic learning, and student autonomy. The study conducted by Chen et al., (2013) also stated that there are differences in how genders participate in online learning social networks, i.e., activity levels, contributions made, and the amount of care displayed to other participants. However, they concluded that male and female students often co-exist in a community that has no separate isolated gender groups.

Albert and Johnson (2011) conducted a study to determine if socioeconomic status and gender would influence students' perceptions of online learning. The study results indicated that there was little difference in overall perceptions based on gender. This research validated the

study of others who found that gender will have an impact on specific areas of learning where one gender excels slightly over the other (Ashong & Commander, 2012; Gonzalez-Gomez, Guardiola, Rodriguez, & Alonso, 2012; Johnson, 2011). These studies showed that females felt a more robust sense of user control over their education than males. This discounts other research which indicated that males had a stronger sense of comfort in online learning, therefore making males feel more in control of the learning situation than females (Hargittai & Shafer, 2006; Kay, 2009; Tsai & Tsai, 2010). An even stronger influence on student perceptions of online learning was socioeconomic status. This socioeconomic indicator shows that working-class students have a more positive perception of online learning than do middle-class students which has support in a previous study by Nunez and Cuccano-Alamin (1998).

Research conducted by Little-Wiles, Fernandez, and Fox (2010) sought to determine if there was a relationship between gender and critical areas of online learning management systems: final grades, online site visits, site activity, chat activity, and message activity. The research determined that there be no significant difference in each of the learning management system functions and gender, which indicated that learning management system usage was independent of gender. The only area that did show a significant difference was in final grades. The study indicated that those participants who utilized the learning management system at a higher volume also had higher final grades. This relationship between utilizing management systems and final grades was evident in both males and female students.

From a somewhat different approach, in a study by Dahalan, Hasan, Hassan, Zakari, and Wan Mohd Noor (2013), it is determined that there be very little difference in the areas of relevance and satisfaction of the online learning experiences between male and female instructors. However, there was a significant difference in the area of getting and keeping

students' attention. This information is important to higher education institutions in recognizing that gender differences can produce different learning environments from an instructional standpoint and are necessary for successful online learning experiences of students.

Satisfaction with online learning regarding gender is of great importance as well. In the study mentioned previously by Gonzalez-Gomez, Guardiola, Rodriguez, and Alonso (2012) it was determined that female students have a higher satisfaction level with online learning than males. This gender differentiation applies to female's overall satisfaction with online learning as well as specific aspects of the learning process that they felt added value to them. However, other specific issues, such as analytical methods showed no gender differences. This research supports that of Shen, Cho, Tsai, and Marra (2013) who identified that gender was a significant indicator of self-efficacy. The research showed that women have higher levels of self-efficacy in online learning than males, and the study indicated that higher levels of self-efficacy lead to higher levels of satisfaction. The idea of interactivity in online classes linking to a more positive sense of student satisfaction has support in research by Durrington, Berryhill, and Swaffor (2006).

This literature indicates that while both males and females can be successful in online learning environments, they are seeking and relating to different aspects of the process. Because of this, it is important that online learning offerings be multi-faceted to meet the learning needs of both male and female students. It is also important to remember that gender can play into the instructor's presentation of information, and this is an important consideration for higher education institutions. Academic leaders and online curriculum developers must be intentional in their approach to presenting online learning models. They must take into consideration the gender-based needs of their potential students and produce a product that is not only convenient

for the student but beneficial to their successful learning of the material. When students have their particular value aspects presented and addressed, only then will they develop a personal sense of connectedness to the course and the online learning process in which they are participating. It is also important to determine if gender impacts non-traditional, undergraduate, online students' sense of connectedness to their university to know how to adapt programs to meet gender differences.

Non-Traditional Students

Many countries across the globe, including the United States, are seeing an increase in non-traditional, adult students entering, or re-entering higher education institutions to pursue a degree (Baptista, 2011; Daniels, 2012; Lindsay, 2012). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), between the years of 2008 and 2019, higher education enrollment of non-traditional students aged 25-34 are expected to increase by 28%, and those students aged 35 and older are expected to increase by 22%. The data about non-traditional students is important when traditionally aged college student (ages 18-24) growth is only anticipating a 12% in the same period. As populations are living longer than ever before, people are remaining in the workforce longer as well. This lengthening of a person's career combined with the pressures of unemployment and the rising cost of living have all made higher education more attractive and necessary for adults wanting to improve their lives (Kimmel, Gaylor, Grubbs, & Hayes, 2012). Talmage, Lacher, Pstross, Knopf and Burkhart (2015) conducted a study on adults age 50 or older who have a classification of third agers who attend higher education institutions as students. According to this study, the number of third agers involved in learning opportunities continues to grow in correlation with older population growth. The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (n.d.) which has a presence on many American college campuses is working to provide

data in the third age group to ensure that their learning experiences are valuable, and meeting their needs. According to Daniels (2012), some older students are returning to higher education as an opportunity to receive the career advancement that an education can provide to them, and they are doing so later in life than ever before. Returning to school will allow these individuals to rise to the level of their peers who took advantage of education earlier in life. This combination of degree attainment and career experience is providing professional opportunities that they did not have available to them previously. Additionally, their ability to stay in the workforce longer and at a potentially higher income level makes the return on investment for their education something they can justify financially.

According to a study conducted by Dougherty and Woodland (2009), in 2003, there were approximately nine million students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at higher education institutions. Of these nine million students, approximately two-thirds were considered non-traditional students. Non-traditional students also referred to as adult learners are those whose age or social situation defines them as adults. In an educational environment, this is traditionally thought to be at age 25 or higher (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Adult students are one of the fastest growing populations enrolled in higher education institutions today and comprise approximately 40% of total college students (Lundberg, 2003). With the growing number of adults returning to higher education, and the research that indicates this number will continue to increase, it is important for higher education to recognize and address the unique aspects of an adult learner. In doing so, it will allow institutions the ability to provide a learning environment that is beneficial to this student group.

Adult learners approach the academic world much like they have approached other areas of their lives up to this point, by using practical knowledge. The practical approach for adult

learners is supported by information provided by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (n.d.) where it indicates that older adult learners want to have some control their learning experiences by being able to choose what and how they will learn. However, in most higher education institutions, this approach will not be sufficient, as institutions are more focused on academic knowledge and skills than practical knowledge (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Adult learners are more focused on becoming independent learners, rather than simply receivers of passive knowledge (Mezirow, 1997; Wang, Sierra & Folger, 2003). Adult learners feel so strongly about the learning they take part in that when they feel that they are being asked to learn information that has no perceived practical value, they often leave the learning environment. Supportive relationships are important to the academic success of any student; however, they are even more important to the non-traditional student. Because adults cannot typically put their lives on hold to attend college, they often must rely on the help and support of others to assist them in the other areas of their lives while working to better their lives. The adult student often battles with feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Magro, 2006; Shah, Goode, West, & Clark, 2014). These feeling may stem from fear of returning to school, or by previous and current academic, social, or cultural challenges which have caused them to doubt their ability to succeed in this attempt as well (Willans & Seary, 2007).

If this self-doubt and sense of inadequacy that many adult learners feel at the thought of returning to college can change, they typically have great success. In a qualitative study by Field, Morgan-Klein, Fleming, Finnegan, Holliday, West, and Merrill (2010), a recurring theme throughout the interviews of the adult, non-traditional students were that their participation in higher education changed their sense of who they were, their personal capabilities, as well as their self-worth. They described it as opening up new possibilities for now and the future. As

Knowles (1984) points out, most adult students are goal oriented, and this includes their approach to being a student. Once they make a decision to start an educational process and find success in it, it can often change the trajectory of their lives due to the increase of self-esteem.

Higher education administrators need to focus on possible strategies that will meet the specific needs of adult learners so these students can move forward successfully (Baptista, 2011). As the age of the college student increases with the influx of adult learners, the methods that higher education institutions use to assist these students in their academic pursuits must change also. Because of this fact, some have suggested that if higher education instructors will help adult students be more successful in their academic pursuits. One idea noted by Kenner and Weinerman (2011) suggested providing a detailed syllabus with clear and concise instructions for them to follow, as this works toward their desire for clear direction. Additionally, Taylor and House (2010) noted that while many universities focus on admission and even sometimes the first term success of non-traditional students, very little support or monitoring of success continues as they maneuver through their degree programs and even after they graduate. Consistent support mechanisms from the seeking stage through the educational process, and clear to post-graduation must be provided to ensure non-traditional students have all the tools necessary for their success.

Two areas that non-traditional students identify as the most challenging for them when returning to higher education are finances and academic advising (Choate & Smith, 2003). A study by Bauman, Wang, DeLeon, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez and Lindsey (2004) supported these concerns when they showed that adult students are often not happy with the advising services provided to them by their college or university. It is important for higher education administrators to recognize this fact and supply support that is beneficial. Another suggestion

for improving adult learner success in their academic pursuits and ultimately fostering a higher sense of connectedness to the university would be to develop a new student experience course that focuses on the specific needs of non-traditional students and to help ensure their overall success and connectedness to the university (Wise, 2011).

While many challenges face non-traditional students when they decide to return to higher education, they are a group, which due to their life experiences, can adapt to new situations successfully. A study conducted by Fernandez (2012) compared traditional and non-traditional students in the areas of self-esteem, family influence, perfectionist tendencies, and academic and emotional adaptability. The study found that personal self-esteem was a factor for both non-traditional and traditional student groups. In the area of family influence, non-traditional students were more influenced by their immediate family, while their family independence influenced traditional students. Perfectionist tendencies only impact the traditional student, while non-traditional students seem to adapt better in both academics and emotions than their traditional counterparts. This information indicates that, if anything, the higher the age of a student can improve the overall academic experience rather than hinder it. This important information should help institutions of higher learning focus on the unique aspects of adult learners and equip university staff to assist them in their academic success, which will, in turn, impact their sense of connectedness to their institution.

A study by Connell (2011) on adult learners' perspectives through interviews on how accommodating universities should be to their individual needs, indicated that most adult learners, administrators, and faculty feel that there should be accommodation but only to a certain point. It is at this point that adult learners need to have the ambition, drive, and determination to push forward regardless of the challenges they may face simply. This approach

puts shared responsibility on the institution and the individual student, creating a collaborative learning environment. The Connell study was effective in that it did not simply look at the situation from a single perspective but one from all points of interest in the educational process.

Non-traditional students are returning to higher education for a multitude of reasons as diverse as the students themselves. Though their reasons and motivation for returning may be different, their needs are very much the same. Adult students need flexible scheduling to include education into their already busy lives that include families, jobs, and additional responsibilities. They need an education that is affordable so that it does not put additional pressure on their current budgets and has a return on investment that will justify the expense of the education itself. They also need learning environments that not only allow for their unique and diverse prior learning experiences but also encourage the sharing of it in the classroom environment. Non-traditional learners need higher education administrators to consider their busy schedules when establishing office hours for the administrative assistance that they need most for their academic success. When we recognize adult students as the unique learners that they are and provided with the tools necessary for their academic success, they will develop a natural sense of connectedness to their university that will impact them as students as well as alumni in a positive way. This type of environment will require proactive and forward thinking administrators who are committed to encouraging non-traditional learners to return to their institution, facilitate continuous intentional actions to ensure that support for adult students continues, and remains open to any new challenges that may be brought to light by this demographic in the future.

Non-traditional students have the ability to change their lives and the lives of future generations in their family when higher education is made available to them in a way that meets their specific needs. These students not only have the power to make a pivotal change for their

circle of influence, but they are also strong contributors to the economic development of their individual communities. The community connection of adult learners is visible in how entrenched they are in their communities through their families, children, and personal attachments and are therefore much less likely to move away once they complete their degree. All of these factors indicate that non-traditional students have much to offer an institution, community, and their families if higher education makes the path for them to achieve a college education attainable on their terms.

Alumni Influence

In the competitive market of higher education, student recruitment is becoming the most important factor for enrollment and selecting which university to attend. As the availability of higher education options increase, it will be necessary for universities to spend more money on branding the institution to ensure continued enrollment numbers (Tas & Ergin, 2012). For online schools or online degrees, this need for effective branding must include the quality of education provided as well as the prospects for career opportunities post-graduation, which may be more challenging than for an established state college. Alumni can play a part in this process through positive word-of-mouth branding for the institution. The most likely representatives of word-of-mouth branding are alumni who have firsthand experience on how the university operates, and the quality of the education they received there. Thus making word-of-mouth advertising a strong contributor and financially inexpensive way to ensure university advancement. When institutions devote themselves to high-quality service in the area of student satisfaction, students will develop a strong sense of loyalty. The created sense of loyalty will manifest itself in an increased willingness to speak highly of the university, enhance the ability to recruit students, and improve the retention rates of the students who are currently enrolled (Li, 2013). This

research puts the onus of student satisfaction on the university to ensure that student experience is positive, which then can result in positive word-of-mouth from alumni who have had positive experiences and share them with potential students. A study was conducted to determine if alumni have a strong enough sense of identification with their alma mater to promote the institution. The results indicated that an increased sense of belonging that an individual student feels to their institution would also increase their perception of the university's distinctiveness and will influence their alumni promotional behaviors (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014). The study also identified the role that self and social identity play to the alumni in their relationship to their alma mater. When individuals promote their institution, it validates their social identity and allows them to positively identify themselves with the organization which leads to their self-distinctiveness (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014).

In a study conducted by Fresk and Mullendore (2012), the researchers sought to determine if on-campus, student employment has an impact on alumni affinity rather than actual student involvement. The results of the qualitative study indicated that campus employed students did experience a sense of affinity to the university based on their interaction with students, faculty, and staff in the working environments. Indicating that it is not only classroom or campus extra-curricular activities that aid in a student's sense of connectedness to the university. This same sense of organizational identity can take place even when students spend much of their time in a working situation on the campus. One important fact in the study was the individual student's perception of his or her job and the attitudes he or she had toward it. Those students who liked and enjoyed their jobs felt that they were developing relationships through the job that were impacting their view of the university. Those students who did not have a positive view of their job or the environment did not feel the same strong sense of community and

connectedness. Students who show an affinity towards their university may have a higher link to alumni participation and support in the future (Fresk & Mullendore, 2012). One of the challenges that higher education institutions face is how to stay in touch with alumni once they leave the campus. Many universities either shut down university emails or even when they remain available, many students stop utilizing them. The ease of access for alumni to donate monetarily, volunteer, or respond to event opportunities will increase participation (Farrow & Yuan, 2011). Higher education needs to implement the concept of web-based, social media access by non-traditional, online students who have experience accessing information through these methods, as well as traditional, younger students who access social media on a regular basis.

A study conducted in Australia by Harvey and Huber (2012) took a different approach to developing alumni participation. The authors sought to develop a program in Australia that was similar to those in the United States but with a somewhat different focus. Using the university foundations program, which is common in Australia, they developed a program to assist alumni in the areas of professional development and continued learning. This program sought to include ongoing professional development and interaction with peers for all degree programs. Five clear objectives were determined to assist alumni. These objectives included participating in an active network; stay up-to-date on current issues in higher education learning and teaching; provide dynamic speakers to encourage the alumni; remain current on innovations and future directions in their field of study; and support alumni leadership potential (Harvey & Huber, 2012). These five objectives were further broken down into specific actions that would benefit the alumni in real time as well as the future. The results of the study, although not huge in alumni participation numbers, was very well received by the participants. The focus on professional learning for the

alumnus after graduation shows a continued interest in the student's individual success that most alumni programs overlook. Once again, however, the need for effective communication with the participants was noted as necessary to the overall success of the program.

Currently, alumni associations are organizations that are focused on receiving financial funding from alumni. This definition of an alumni association is obvious by the number of studies conducted on the subject of alumni giving (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Lertputtarak & Sapitchayangkool, 2014; Skari, 2014; Tiger & Preston, 2013). However, there is much less research available on the altruistic aspects of alumni participation.

One such study by the United States Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) battalions and how the altruistic approach can be related to corporations that want to use retired employees to recruit new talent for their organization (Pennington, 2011). Interestingly, the study by Pennington (2011) did not emphasize any financial contributions to the ROTC program by the alumni but rather focused on the altruistic aspects only such as mentoring, networking, and recruiting. This non-monetary approach causes higher education institutions to consider the impact of focusing on altruistic participation from alumni, and how they could create an environment where alumni then choose to make financial donations rather than being asked to do so.

Another study that focused on aspects of alumni participation with a non-monetary focus was conducted by Gallo (2011). Gallo's study looked at the added value that alumni bring to a higher education institution and the institutional advancement that they provide. The researchers stated that alumni have a vested interest in how others perceive their alma mater because it is directly related to their value and qualifications as an alumnus. It is for this reason that students must understand the value they add to their university in their role as alumni and then, make a

personal decision as to whether they will have a part in that advancement process. The focus of Gallo's research was to use institutional advancement to build long-term alumni relationships rather than a shallow relationship that is based solely on financial benefits to the university (Gallo, 2011). The author identified that only when relationship building is the key element in the alumni program will there be lasting financial benefits to the institution, rather than the other way around. Strong future relationships can only happen when students understand what an alumnus is, the impact they have on the institution and the fact that the relationship is one that will be for a lifetime, regardless of their participation or contributions (Gallo, 2011). When alumni associations make their emphasis on nurturing relationships with students while they are enrolled, they will create a situation where students naturally want to participate as an alumnus after graduation.

In a study by McDearmorn (2010), young alumni were surveyed and found that they would be more likely to donate to their alma mater if there were incentives or something in exchange for their donations. The concept of volunteerism and the factors that influence it are part of a study by Forbes and Zampelli (2014) where the results indicated that non-traditional, online alumni might be more likely to participate in volunteer efforts as they have greater diversity in friendships and are more involved in formal groups. Additionally, the study showed that those who participate in religious or church activities are more likely to volunteer as well as those with education beyond the high school level. These indicators for participating in volunteer activities also define non-traditional students and their potential engagement in an alumni association. Age and level of degree completed at a university have a high impact on alumni participation according to Newman and Petrosko (2011). In their study, the data indicated that with every year of age, alumni become more likely to give to their alma mater. In

the area of degree completion, the data indicated that the higher the degree, the lower the likelihood of donating to that university. The reasoning behind this is that after the Bachelor's degree, students might be more conflicted on which university to give to and typically, will donate to the school in which they received their first degree, and achieved their first academic accomplishment. These two factors again align with successful non-traditional, online undergraduate students and their potential participation in alumni organizations. This study shows two important factors. First, we see the majority of information available on alumni participation is that of financial giving rather than an altruistic approach. Second, we see that non-traditional, online, undergraduate students have had no research conducted to determine if their tendencies for alumni participation differ from their traditional-aged, traditional classroom attending counterparts.

Priest and Donley (2014) introduced a program that would connect young alumni who are successful leaders in their careers to mentor college students. This program provided a positive mentoring opportunity for students to learn from and the alumni to "give back" to their alma mater. This creation of a mutually beneficial program provided a positive alumni experience that would encourage the students to do the same after graduation. This type of an alumni mentoring program could be very beneficial for the online, non-traditional student to develop a stronger connection to the university as well as personal confidence, career direction, and networking.

As the online, non-traditional, undergraduate student population is growing in higher education institutions across America, it is important to research this student demographic to determine their sense of connectedness to the university and if that strength of connectedness has any correlation on their interest in alumni participation. It is important to consider the potential

monetary benefits of non-traditional graduates donating to their alma mater. Research conducted by Kena et al., (2015) in their U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, research titled *The Condition of Education 2015* (NCES 2015-144) looked at the employment rates of both traditional and non-traditional graduates. In this research, there is a difference in the number of traditional and non-traditional aged graduates who are employed. According to the research, the unemployment rates by age group and educational attainment in 2014 were as follows: unemployed 20-24-year-olds with a Bachelor's degree or higher was at 6.7%, while the unemployment rate for 25-64-year-olds was only 3.4%. This 3.3% population difference can make a considerable contribution impact in alumni participation of activities as well as financial donations. Making the potential for non-traditional, online graduate contributions to higher education institutions a very important one for alumni organizations for years to come.

Organizational Identity and Connectedness

Social connectedness is defined as the sense of closeness and belonging of an individual to a social network that improves their mental health and well-being (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). In a study by Ashford and Mael (1989), an individual's level of organizational identity will increase as they feel that the organization is distinctive enough to impact their sense of identity positively. Thus, the stronger the individual feels that their institution has value to themselves and others the stronger their identity will be to it. In a study outlined previously by Stephenson and Yerger (2014), when students have a higher sense of social identity or connectedness to their university or institution, they have a higher likelihood of participation and involvement in alumni associations. With this information in mind, it is important to determine the impact of organizational identity on the student's interest in alumni activities after

graduation. Hong and Yang (2009) identified in their research that students who experience higher levels of organizational identity are more likely to participate in positive word-of-mouth marketing for an institution which can be a recruitment tool for alumni organizations. According to Wilkins, Butt, Kratochvil, and Balakrishman (2015), university alumni associations do not put enough focus on the student's organizational identity to the institution while they are a student to maximize their potential as alumni post-graduation fully. Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2010) identified that school connectedness is a known factor in positive student achievement. Additionally, a study by Beer, Clark, and Jones (2010) determined that student engagement leads to success at the undergraduate level in key areas such as academic achievement, attrition, retention, motivation and even success at the institutional level. Research conducted by Wilkins, Butt, Kratochvil, and Balakrishman (2015) saw the same concept of organizational identity or connectedness linking to positive student achievement. These studies indicate the importance of organizational identity to an institution and how it impacts the experience and outcomes of students participating in the higher education experience.

A study by Brown (2012) on student connectedness in the K-12 environment indicated that when schools focus on the student's human side, it begins to develop their tendencies to remain engaged later in life. This idea of a human side speaks to their most basic need to feel safe and also provide a means for them to build relationships. According to Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (2001), some aspects of traditional learning that diminish, when presented online, are met through organizational identity. Some areas of loss identified are cooperation, coordination, and long-term effort. This research identifies that a strong sense of organizational connectedness is necessary for both traditional and virtual educational environments. If students

do not feel connected to their institution, they may not remain as a student or ever feel as though they are a part of the collective whole of the university.

Although online students do not have the same connection to a physical university that traditional students who attend their classes on a specific campus do, the literature indicates that online students still build a sense of connectedness when they have effective online courses. The ability to provide online learning that instills a strong sense of connectedness is possible as we see in the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement, which polls over 350,000 students from more than 600 institutions. The report showed that Western Governors University, which is a completely online competency-based university, rated higher in several key areas of engagement than their traditional university counterparts (Bethke, 2015). According to the research mentioned we see that it is possible for online learners to be connected and committed to their alma mater after graduation. Research states that the level of satisfaction that students have towards an online course can be strongly related to their sense of connectedness to the university (LaBarbera, 2013).

While many universities are trying to address the challenge of online student engagement, faculty can use technologies that are already available to develop social connectedness among online students through quality academic and social experiences (Daves & Roberts, 2010). The Daves and Roberts study goes on to indicate that online students who communicated with their class peers through virtual means had an even stronger sense of connectedness than their traditional counterparts, providing affirmation that online learning can still develop a strong sense of connectedness to the participants. Ashford and Mael (1989) stated that there are three predictors of organizational identity. These three predictors are the extent of contact between the individual and the organization, the visibility of the organizational

membership, and the attractiveness of the organizational identity. These three predictors are equally as true for higher education and can be accomplished if the institution is intentional in its actions toward the virtual student. LaBarbera (2013) recognized that retention issues are of great concern to higher education institutions and more specifically for those who enroll in online programs. A report by Tyler-Smith (2006) indicates that the dropout rate of online students is 10-20% higher than those in traditional programs. It is for this reason that online courses and degree programs must be proactive in their teaching methods to ensure student satisfaction and ultimately their sense of connectedness to the course and the university. Jones and Volpe (2011) indicate in their study that colleges and universities should focus on increasing their institutional prestige as this increases the identification of their members. We also see this link of perceived connectedness in relationship to alumni when research noted that universities sometimes focus on ensuring their institution presents a strong sense of prestige outside the organization but fail to develop a strong sense of identity from within. When this is the case, institutions may be hurting their future in the area of alumni giving and participation (Jones & Volpe, 2011). Bolinger and Inan (2012) indicated in their research that online students have a weaker sense of connectedness and belonging to their educational institution than their traditional counterparts, which is contradictory to the Daves and Roberts (2010) data. However, the recent Gallup-Purdue Index (2014) refuted this idea when the data indicated that students from a completely online university, Western Governors University, are almost twice as likely to be emotionally attached to their online university than alumni from more traditional universities. Once again this indicates that student connectedness is not dependent on traditional face-to-face education and contradicts the research of Bolinger and Inan (2012). The strong sense of connectedness could be in part due to the value that Western Governors University places on faculty/student

relationship development. According to a study conducted by LaBarbera (2013), faculty who interact with their students at higher levels contribute to students' higher perceptions of connectedness as well as their overall satisfaction with the course and their education as a whole. The study went further to encourage intentional actions on the part of faculty members such as increased communication, emails, and interaction with the individual students.

The studies shown here indicate the importance of organizational connectedness on the involvement of the individual, as well as on individuals' academic success regardless of the method of instruction in which they are participating. What seems to be contradictory in the literature is whether the same levels of connectedness are achievable through both face-to-face learning experiences and online. A study by Drouin and Vartanian (2010) compared students' sense of community in both face-to-face and online courses. Drouin and Vartanian (2010) compared the two learning environments, and while student age demographics were somewhat different in the two groups, there was no difference in the students' sense of connectedness to their university based on the mode of presentation. This direct comparison of the two different learning environments provides a strong case for online learning and student sense of connectedness.

The importance of students' sense of connectedness to their higher education institution has been clearly studied in the literature and indicates higher levels of degree completion as well as satisfaction with their learning experience. The literature typically has looked at this from an involvement perspective of the traditional student in a traditional campus environment. Where there is some debate in the literature is whether that same level of connectedness is achievable in an online learning environment. Additionally, there has been no research on the level of connectedness of a student and how that correlates to a student's interest in alumni participation

after graduation. Finally, no research is available on completely online, non-traditional students and their sense of connectedness to a higher education institution that they have never been required to come to physically.

Summary

The literature has shown that both Social Exchange Theory and Social Identity Theory impact an individual's sense of connectedness to groups and organizations. This sense of connectedness develops the individual's personal self-esteem and is evident through participation in organizations such as university alumni groups that build camaraderie and sense of belonging. In the area of online education, we know that it is a growing trend in higher education and is becoming necessary to meet the changing needs of our higher education student population.

More students than ever before need to work while attending college as well as juggling very complicated schedules. These factors are making online education very appealing to a wide demographic of student. Additionally, with technology becoming more prevalent in our society, even traditional-aged students are more comfortable in online classes due to their familiarity with the internet. The student demographic referred to as non-traditional, typically who are over the age of 25, are attending college in record numbers. The changes in our society and economy are both playing a part in this trend toward adults returning to college.

While they are returning in record numbers, they are doing so with many challenges that higher education has not had to consider with a more traditional aged student. These students are returning to college while still attempting to balance a job or career, raising a family, and addressing financial and social responsibilities. These challenges are causing higher education to find new ways to meet their unique needs and still make higher education and its benefits

available to all. Non-traditional students returning to college has been a learning experience for both the adult learner, as well as for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators.

The influence that an alumni association can have on a higher education institution is great. Alumni provide financial benefits, recruitment, word-of-mouth advertising, as well as many altruistic benefits. With the declining federal funding for colleges and universities, it is important for alumni associations to continue to develop their alumni base to help with these funding issues. The current alumni programming efforts focus toward the traditional college student who had an on-campus lived experience. Unfortunately, based on the information provided earlier, there is a large number of students who are attending college via online classes, and many of which are non-traditional in age. These factors are changing the look of the alumni who are graduating today and may not have the same connection that a traditional on-campus student would.

In the area of organizational identity and connectedness, we know that there is a strong link between individuals' sense of connectedness to an organization and their willingness to advocate for that organization. This voluntary advocacy approach is true in a work or higher education environment. When students have a strong sense of connectedness or identity to the university, they are more likely to participate in alumni activities after graduation. Building a strong sense of on-campus connectedness has had a large influence on the development of alumni associations up to this point and has been effective. However, as we see the demographic of higher education learning experiences and age groups changing, there are many things we do not know. We do not know if online students have the same sense of connectedness to their college or university as an on-campus student. We do not know if non-traditional students feel the same sense of connectedness to their alma mater as their traditional counterparts. We do not

know if non-traditional and online students have a desire to be connected to their university after graduation. We do not know if there is a link between online, non-traditional students' sense of connectedness to their university and their interest after graduation to participation in alumni activities of any kind.

Building on the research of individuals who have looked at the traditional, on-campus student's sense of connectedness and how it correlates to an interest in alumni participation, by focusing on an online, non-traditional population will open up new insight to a growing student population. Understanding whether students who are older and attend college online have a strong enough sense of connectedness to their institution and therefore, want to participate in alumni opportunities after graduating, is important to higher education. This information will provide alumni associations with important data to help them develop programs that meet the needs of all students, especially in the face of the growing numbers of the non-traditional student population.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Design

The purpose of this non-experimental correlational study is to determine if there is a significant relationship between non-traditional students' level of organizational identity to their alma mater and their interest in participating in alumni programs after graduation. Additionally, the study also seeks to determine if gender plays a role in participating in alumni programs. The research is quantitative in nature because it uses a score on a validated instrument to measure variables of interest (Howell, 2011). The correlational research design allows the ability to discover relationships between the variables without manipulating them (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). According to Punch (2005), the correlational design shows both how the variables are related and how much they are related. The predictor variable is the organizational identity level of non-traditional, online, undergraduate students. Organizational identity is an individual's sense of belonging or identification with a group or organization (Ashford & Mael, 1989). Non-traditional students are those whose age or social situation defines them as adults. In an educational environment, this typically include students age 25 or higher (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Online students are individuals who participate in learning that takes place completely in an internet-based environment that does not include face-to-face meetings with faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2010b). The criterion variable is the involvement level in alumni programs after graduation. Typically, alumni participation is monetarily giving to the institution; however, this also includes recruitment, promoting the university, and branding the university logo (Gaier, 2005). Alumni Association is an organization that connects former students to their alma mater and provide services to them that they find valuable and supports the university's mission (Penn State Alumni Association, 2005).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university?

Null Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for this study are:

H₀1: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀2: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀3: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university.

Participants and Setting

The convenience sample for this study will be undergraduate alumni who attended a private Christian university in the southeastern United States (Southeastern University – pseudonym) (SU) and completed their degree in an online learning program. The physical university for this study is in the southeastern part of the United States; however, these participants could be located all over the United States and in foreign countries. The university offers fully accredited bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. The online division of SU is a pioneer in distance education where in 1985 they began to allow higher education from any location in the world. SU's student body represents every state in the United States, Washington D.C. and 90 different countries. The University claims to offer over 200 online degree programs from certificates to doctoral degrees. The online university focuses on working adults by creating a setting where they complete class work on their time while maintaining the already demanding responsibilities of family and work (Liberty University Online, 2016).

The sample will consist of the following: alumni completing their undergraduate degree in an online environment that requires no attendance at the campus and are include only non-traditional students. This school's total population of undergraduate, online alumni totals approximately 12,000 including a large, non-traditional population.

A convenience sample of alumni fitting the criteria of starting their undergraduate degree at the age of 25 or older and having completed an entirely online program received a survey questionnaire. The alumni association of SU selected the sample population by using data analysis to determine the students who met the criteria listed above. This data analysis produced a list of all participants who met the requirements for the study. A member of the alumni office at SU conducted the random convenience sample to provide anonymity to the participants and meet all SU security protocols. A random selection process identified all participants for the

survey and was sent an initial email from the alumni department identifying that they were eligible to participate in a voluntary survey.

All recipients had equal ability to choose to decline or participate in the survey. If recipients chose to click on the link that identified they were willing to participate in the survey, they were then sent to the survey page to begin the process. Any individual who clicked on this link had their responses sent to the alumni association after completion. The representative from the SU alumni association selected an initial sample of 1,000 participants who met the criteria to receive the survey, with the option to randomly select additional participants if necessary based on the desire to reach the target sample size.

The target sample size for a correlational research study is 120 participants for a medium effect size at the .05 alpha level with the statistical power of .7 (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The sample size available for this research had the potential to meet the minimum sample size expectation, and the total number of randomly selected participants was 2,500. Additionally, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that the statistical power of research increases automatically with a larger sample size which creates a smaller difference with which to reject the null hypothesis. Based on this information, the sample size of this group had the potential to reject the null hypothesis. The sample consisted of a total of 110 participants, which is a 4.4% response rate. Of the participants, there were 47 males and 63 females. All participants started their undergraduate degree at the age of 25 or older and completed their undergraduate degree completely online. The ages of all participants at the start of their online program ranged from 25 to 68, with the mean age at 39.68 years, the median was 37 years, and the mode was 27 years. Of the male participants the ages ranged from 26 to 63, with a mean age of 40.17 years, the median was 37 years, and the mode was 35 years. For female participants the ages ranged from

25 to 68, with the mean age of 39.60 years, the median was 38 years, and the mode was 28 years of age.

Instrumentation

This study consisted of two instruments. The first is the Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) developed by Jones and Volpe (2011) (Reproduced with permission, see Appendix A). The second is the Alumni Involvement Survey (AIS) used by Newman (2009) (Reproduced with permission, see Appendix B).

Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale

Jones and Volpe (2011) adapted their Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) from Mael and Ashford (1992) who created a similar scale to measure organizational identity. The purpose of the OIDPS instrument was to measure the level of organizational identity that students had to their university based on their educational experience with that institution (Jones & Volpe, 2011). There were 19 total questions on the survey; four of which were reverse-worded. The structure of the survey had three sub-scales: organizational identification with a total of six questions, organizational distinctiveness scale with a total of seven questions, and organizational prestige scale with a total of six questions. The scales used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Very Weak to Very Strong. Responses were as follows: Very Strong = 5, Strong = 4, Neutral = 3, Weak = 2, Very Weak = 1. The combined possible score on the OIDPS would range from 19 to 95 points for all questions. A score of 19 points indicated that the student had very weak levels of organizational identity to the university, and a score of 95 points was the highest possible score, indicating that the student felt a very strong sense of organizational identity to the university. The approximate time to complete this instrument was 15 minutes. See Appendix C for permission to use the instrument.

Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha for each section of the scale.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha for Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness and Prestige Scale

Scale	Coefficient Alpha
Organizational Identification	0.79
Organizational Distinctiveness	0.71
Organizational Prestige	0.68

The reliability of the OIDPS has three separate sets. The organizational identification section has a coefficient α of 0.79, meeting the acceptable level for Cronbach's alpha set at 0.70 or higher. The organizational distinctiveness section has a coefficient α of 0.71, which also meets the acceptable level. The organizational prestige section has a coefficient α of 0.68 which falls into the questionable range. However, it is in the high range of that level. Several studies utilize the original Mael and Ashford (1992) instrument in some form (Boivie, Lange, McDonald, & Westphal, 2011; DeConinck, DeConinck, & Lockwood, 2015; Elstak, Bhatt, Van Riel, Pratt, & Berens, 2015; Moriano, Molero, Topa, & Mangin, 2014; Uen, Ahlstrom, Chen, and Liu, 2015). To ensure that the dependent and independent variables were distinct, Jones and Volpe (2011) used the LISREL 8.80 to complete a confirmatory factor analysis on the three parts of the OIDPS: organizational identification, organizational distinctiveness, and organizational prestige. A test of the three-factor model ensured that indicator and latent variables were set to correlate at 1.0. Fit indices indicated that they met acceptable standards, and provided evidence of the discriminant validity of organizational identity, organizational distinctiveness, and organizational prestige (Jones & Volpe, 2011). The instrument is administered through a self-reporting, online survey in which a link is sent to potential participants through email. The survey uses a Likert scale.

Alumni Involvement Survey

The Alumni Involvement Survey (AIS), by Newman (2009), was developed specifically for a dissertation and validity was determined by consulting a panel of experts. With survey modifications complete, a two-stage pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the survey instrument, and survey changes completed. The purpose of the AIS instrument was to measure the participation in alumni activities after students graduate from their alma mater (Newman, 2009). The instrument consisted of 20 questions. There were three subscales within the instrument: campus involvement with a total of 12 questions, current alumni connections with two questions, and education questions that consisted of six questions. In the campus involvement subscale, the instrument used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Very Frequently to Never. Responses were as follows: Very Frequently = 5, Frequently = 4, Occasionally = 3, Very Rarely = 2, Never = 1. In the education questions sub-scale, the instrument used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Responses were as follows: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. The combined possible score for the AIS ranged from 20 to 100 points. A score of 20 points would indicate that the student had a low-involvement level in alumni activities, and a score of 100 points is the highest possible score, indicating that the student had a very high-involvement level in alumni activities. The approximate time to complete the instrument was 15 minutes. See Appendix D for permission to use the instrument. The reliability measurement for each scale by Cronbach's alpha is in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha for Alumni Involvement Survey

Scale	Coefficient Alpha
Frequency of Involvement	0.85

Positive Alumni Feelings	0.94
Positive Student Feelings	0.89
University Perceptions	0.89
Alumni Association Perceptions	0.88

The reliability of the OIDPS has five separate sets. The frequency of involvement had a coefficient α of 0.85; positive alumni feelings had a coefficient α of 0.94; positive student feelings had a coefficient α of 0.89; University perceptions had a coefficient α of 0.89; and alumni association perceptions had a coefficient α of 0.88; all of which are considered to be reliable at an acceptable level. Newman and Petrosko (2011) utilized the alumni involvement survey in their study. To determine content validity, the researcher consulted a panel of experts, and the survey instrument was designed based on the professional experience of that panel. A pilot test determined the effectiveness of the survey, and necessary edits completed (Newman, 2009). Data gathering and factor analysis of each of the five sets ensured construct validity. In order to determine which variables to use, the researcher-included factors from the alumni association membership decision model, other survey questionnaires, and information received from Alumni membership practitioners. The scale included the following five factors: alumni involvement, alumni feelings, student feelings, university perceptions, and alumni association perceptions. All five sets were determined to be valid with a Cronbach's α of 0.70 or higher (Newman, 2009). The instrument consisted of a survey using a five-point Likert scale.

Procedures

The learning institution approved the request to conduct the research with their undergraduate alumni (See Appendix E for IRB approval) received review Board (IRB) and approval. Once IRB approval was received, the university alumni association facilitated the

email contact with their alumni membership who met the demographic requirements including beginning their undergraduate, completely online degree at SU at the age of 25 or older. These specific demographic requirements were chosen to look at non-traditional students who utilized a completely online degree program, and focusing on the undergraduate degree level, as research indicates that students have a stronger alliance to the institution from which they received their first degree (Newman & Petrosko, 2011). The population selection process was through a random sample selection of the alumni population from SU meeting the research criteria. Specific sorting data was used on all alumni based on age, online program, and degree completion requirements mentioned, and then participants were randomly selected by the alumni office to receive the initial request to participate email. Each alumnus received an email to his or her personal and university email addresses that were on file with the university. Each identified alumni meeting the research criteria within the random sample, received an initial email explaining the purpose of the study, and letting them know the potential time commitment to completing the survey (See Appendix F for initial email). The bottom of the initial contact email prompted alumni to click a link, which took them to the consent form. See Appendix G for the consent form. Once the graduate consented to the study, automatic connection to the survey link and the actual survey appeared for participants to begin. A second reminder email went to each alumnus two weeks before the survey deadline. See Appendix H for the second reminder email. A third reminder email was sent one week before the deadline as a final reminder of the survey deadline. See Appendix I for the second reminder email. All surveys were returned to the university alumni association to ensure complete privacy and anonymity of the participants. A spreadsheet with only the participants' assigned participant number and responses were provided to the researcher by the alumni staff to conduct the data analysis. To ensure that the two parts of

the survey remained linked to the proper student, they remained as separate surveys, but the two surveys were linked together via a redirect link within the Qualtrics survey program. Composite scores for each survey instrument received a total and data analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between the two variables.

Analysis

The quantitative data analyzed for this study came from the two Likert scale instruments, the Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) and the Alumni Involvement Scale (AIS). The collected data would allow each participant to receive a score for overall organizational identity as well as alumni involvement. Each participant received a total score for each of the two variables. From the total responses received, any who completed only the demographic information, but did not complete any of the survey questions, were removed from the data set. Any respondents who neglected to answer one question, would receive a neutral score for that question, but would remain in the data set as it would not significantly impact the total score. The remaining participants were screened for outliers as extreme outcomes can distort the final range (Howell, 2011). Data screening included creating boxplots to test for extreme outliers in the data set. All identified outliers were removed from the data set. Assumption testing included examining histograms of each instrument's group of scores to ensure normality of distribution, creating scatterplots for linear relationship of the two variables and testing for homogeneity of variance (Howell, 2011). Bonferroni Correction was completed to prevent type 1 errors from occurring when several tests are run on the same data set (Howell, 2011). The research tested $m = 3$ hypotheses with a preferred $\alpha = 0.05$, making the Bonferroni correction for each hypotheses at $\alpha = 0.05/3 = 0.0166$. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, also known as Pearson's (r) was conducted to determine the correlation between the students'

level of organizational identity and alumni involvement, as both variables are continuous data (Mukaka, 2012). The effect size was based on accepted ranges for Pearson's r of -1 to 1 with specific sizes of small (0.10), medium (0.30) and large (0.50), which refers to the strength of relationship as well as the direction between the two variables. The effect size was determined with a two-tailed t -Test Design. The Pearson's (r) tested the three null hypotheses, and determined the degree of relationship between the variables: organizational identity and interest level in alumni participation. Analysis was conducted separately for males and females to determine the relationship of organizational identity and alumni involvement when considering gender. Additional analysis was run on the Alumni Involvement Survey question, which asked participants to identify any family members who had attended the same university. The response rate results were provided. From this data, the participants were separated by those who had family members who had also attended the institution either online or on campus, and Pearson's (r) was tested separately to determine if the correlation between sense of connectedness and alumni involvement levels had significantly different outcomes due to family influence (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine the level of organizational identity, distinctiveness, and prestige of online, non-traditional, undergraduate students to their higher education institution (Jones & Volpe, 2011) and their subsequent interest in alumni participation (Newman, 2009) after graduation. This chapter will contain the researcher's statistical data from the study in which the reader will find graphs, tables, and statistics presented in the order in which the research questions and hypotheses outlined in previous chapters.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university?

Null Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀2: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students from a southeastern private religious university.

H₀3: There is no relationship between organizational identity and interest in participating in an alumni association among online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students from a southeastern private religious university.

Descriptive Statistics

Data collected from 110 non-traditional graduates who completed an online, undergraduate degree at a private religious university in the Southeastern United States, and all data entered into SPSS. Of the participants completing the survey ($n = 110$), 47 (43%) were male and 63 (57%) were female. The ages of all participants at the start of their online program ranged from 25 to 68, with the mean age at 39.68 years, the median was 37 years, and the mode was 27 years (5.45%). Of the male participants the ages ranged from 26 to 63, with a mean age of 40.17 years, the median was 37 years, and the mode was 35 years (10.6%). For female participants the ages ranged from 25 to 68, with the mean age of 39.60 years, the median was 38 years, and the mode was 28 years of age (9.5%). OIDPS total scores ranged between 36 and 94 with a mean of 77.13, median of 78, and mode of 77 (7.3%). OIDPS total scores for male participants ranged between 36 and 90 with the mode of 77 (10.6%). OIDPS total scores for female participants ranged between 59 and 94 with the most reported scores of 58, 61, 63, and 68 (7.9% each). The mean and standard deviation for the predictor variable (organizational identity) of the participants separated by gender are in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Predictor Variable by Gender

Variable/Gender	N	Mean	S.D.
Organizational Identity/Male	47	75.9787	9.73673

Organizational Identity/Female	63	78.0000	8.57792
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AIS total scores ranged between 39 and 92 with a mean of 62.04, median of 61 and multiple modes of 58 and 68 (7.3% each). AIS total scores for male participants ranged between 39 and 92 with the scores of 55 and 67 being most reported (8.5%), followed by scores of 56, 58, 60, 64, 68, and 75 (6.4% each). AIS total scores for female participants ranged between 44 and 80 with the most reported score of 75 (7.9%) followed by the scores of 82 and 84 (6.3% each). The mean and standard deviation of the criterion variable (alumni involvement) of the participants separated by gender is in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Criterion Variable by Gender

Variable/Gender	N	Mean	S.D.
Alumni Involvement/Male	47	62.8723	10.91193
Alumni Involvement/Female	63	61.4286	7.92854

Of the total participants ($n = 110$), 26 participants identified that they had some family member who attended the same university. Of the family member identified participants ($n = 26$) 33 family connections were identified. The family connections reported were spouses with ($n = 16$) at 14.5%, children ($n = 10$) at 9.1%, siblings with ($n = 4$) at 3.6%, and parents with ($n = 3$) at 2.7%.

Results

Data Screening

Data collected from 142 graduates, of which 28 participants completed the demographic information but did not complete any survey questions that caused a large number of missing scores. Thus, it was necessary to remove these 28 participants from the data. Three participants completed the entire survey except for one question each. Each of these questions

received a neutral score for the missing question, and because it did not significantly affect the data, they remained in the data set. The remaining data was screened for outliers. Data screening included a boxplot to determine if there were any extreme outliers present and if present detected by casewise diagnostics. Four additional participants required removal from the dataset due to outliers (codes 5, 8, 13, and 33). The outliers detected in the OIDPS scores are in Figure 2, and the outliers detected in the AIS scores are in Figure 3. At the completion of data screening 110 participants remained.



Figure 2. Outlier boxplot for OIDPS. This figure shows the outliers identified through a box plot from the OIDPS portion of the survey.

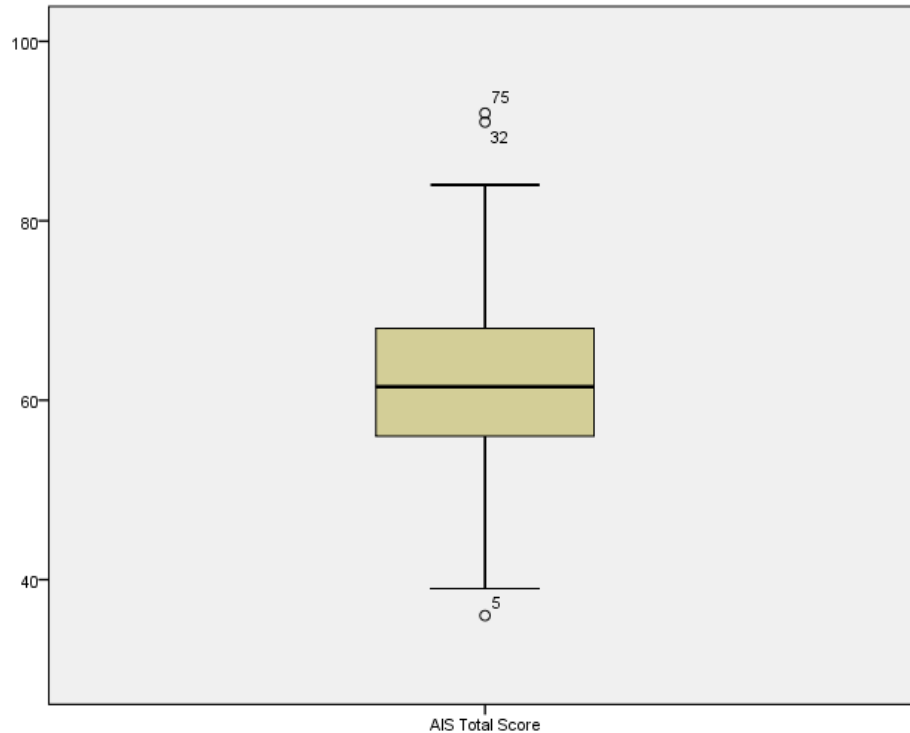


Figure 3. Outlier boxplot for AIS. This figure shows the outliers identified through a box plot from the AIS portion of the survey.

The researcher then ran a histogram to determine the shape and potential skewness of the bell curve and if it was necessary to complete Pearson's r . Due to the large sample size, $N=110$, it was necessary to conduct the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality to determine if the data were normally distributed at the .05 alpha level. The criterion variable, Alumni Interest ($p=.200$), was found tenable at the .05 level. The assumption was not found tenable at the .05 alpha level for the predictor variable, organizational identity ($p=.049$). See Figure 4 for Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality on the OIDPS, and Figure 5 for Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality on the AIS.

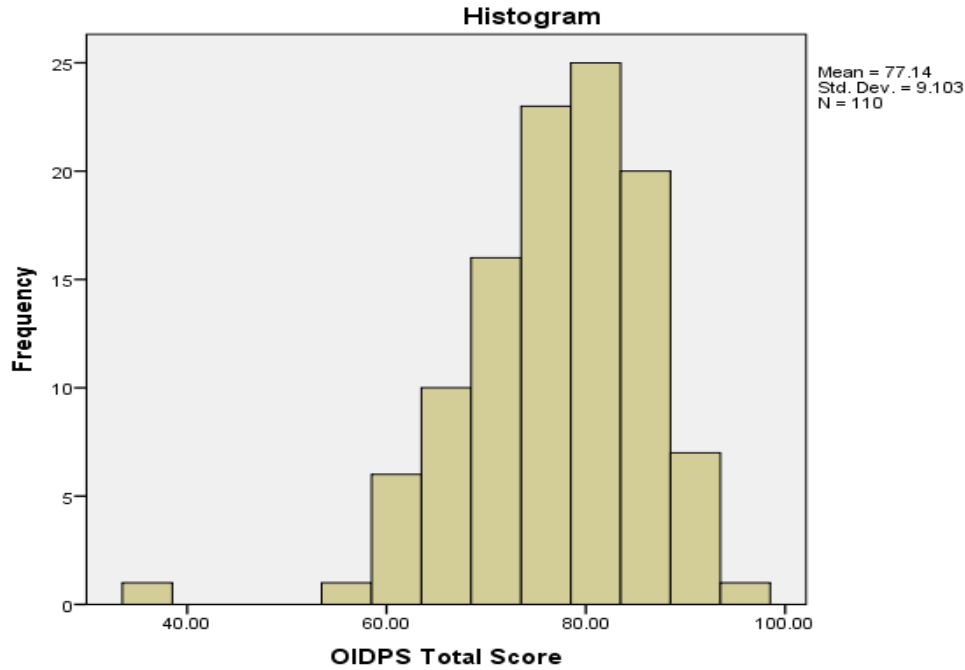


Figure 4. Histogram of Normality of OIDPS. This figure illustrates the distribution of normality for the OIDPS portion of the survey.

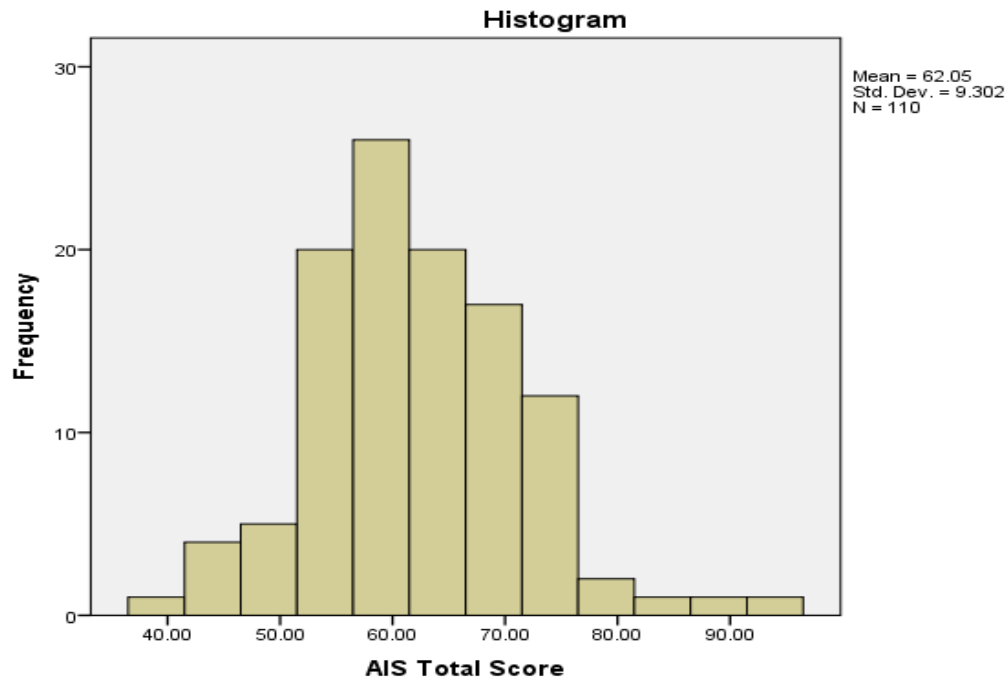


Figure 5. Histogram of Normality of AIS. This figure shows the distribution of normality for the AIS portion of the survey.

An assumption was run on the linear relationship between the two variables. The dependent or criterion variable was plotted against the independent or predictor variable and checked for linearity to see the relationship of change between the two variables. See Figure 6 for the male scatter plot and Figure 7 for the female scatter plot.

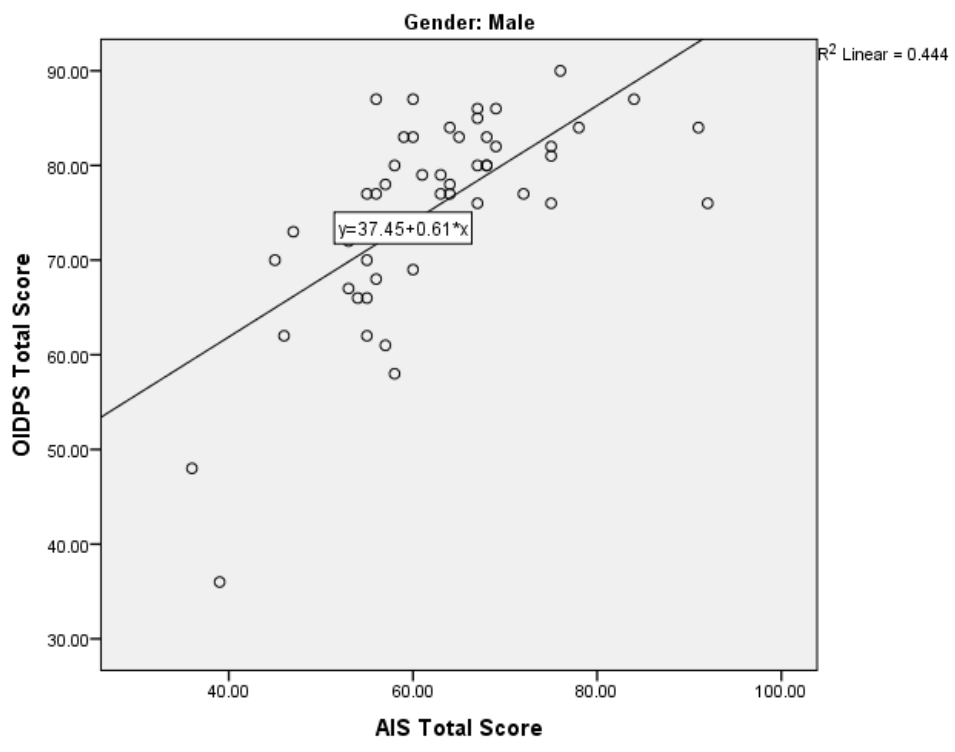


Figure 6. Scatter plot for males. This figure shows the linear relationship scatter plot for male participants.

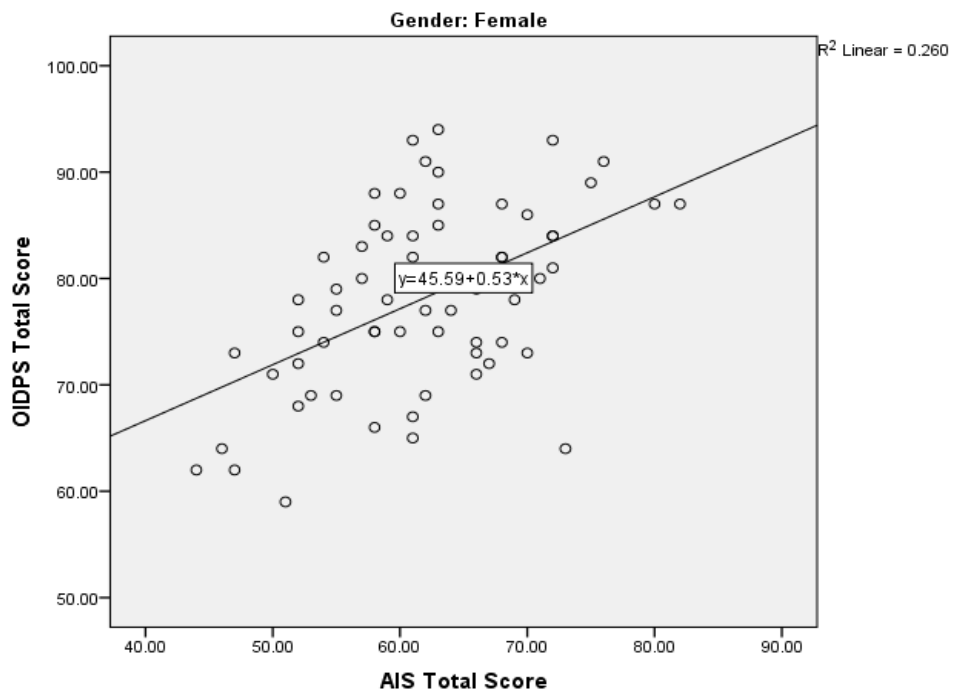


Figure 7. Scatter plot for females. This figure shows the linear relationship scatter plot for female participants.

An assumption of bivariate normal distribution was tested. This assumption was necessary to determine the statistical significance of the Pearson correlation through bivariate normality. A scatter plot between the predictor variable of organizational identity (X) and the criterion variable of Alumni Involvement (Y) ensured bivariate normal distribution. The classic cigar shape identified that this assumption had been met, identifying the presence of homogeneity (see figure 8).

OIDPS	Male	Female	-2.0213	1.75328	.751	-6.2514	2.2088
		All	-1.1576	1.58518	1.000	-4.9822	2.6669
	Female	Male	2.0213	1.75328	.751	-2.2088	6.2514
		All	.8636	1.43724	1.000	-2.6040	4.3313
	All	Male	1.1576	1.58518	1.000	-2.6669	4.9822
		Female	-.8636	1.43724	1.000	-4.3313	2.6040
AIS	Male	Female	1.4438	1.79427	1.000	-2.8852	5.7728
		All	.8269	1.62234	1.000	-3.0871	4.7408
	Female	Male	-1.4438	1.79427	1.000	-5.7728	2.8852
		All	-.6169	1.47085	1.000	-4.1656	2.9318
	All	Male	-.8269	1.62224	1.000	-4.7408	3.0871
		Female	.6169	1.47085	1.000	-2.9318	4.1656

Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 86.661.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson's r was used to test the null hypotheses of all three-research questions at the .05 alpha level.

Null Hypotheses One

Research question one (RQ1) asked whether the OIDPS survey scores showed a positive and statistically significant relationship to the AIS scores reported in the survey instrument used in the study. To determine if this relationship existed, the researcher tested all data using the Pearson r . For 110 participants, the total scores for OIDPS ($M=77.1364$, $SD=9.10336$) and the total scores on the AIS ($M=62.0455$, $SD= 9.30166$). Table 6 illustrates the descriptive statistics. Both the OIDPS and AIS were found positive or significant through Pearson Correlation, $r(110) = .546$, with an effect size of $p < .001$. (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Table 7 illustrates these results.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for all Participants - Null Hypotheses One

Instrument	N	Mean	S.D.
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OIDPS	110	77.1364	9.10336
AIS	110	62.0455	9.30166

Table 7. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Results of Null Hypotheses One

Instrument	Correlation	OIDPS Total Score	AIS Total Score
OIDPS Total Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.546**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	110	110
AIS Total Score	Pearson Correlation	.546**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Therefore, the results of Pearson r on RQ1 rejected the null hypothesis H_01 : There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation.

Null Hypotheses Two

Research question two (RQ2) sought to determine if there was a positive or statistically significant relationship between the OIDPS survey responses and the AIS survey responses for men. As with RQ1, the researcher used the Pearson r for this analysis. As illustrated in Table 8, the 47 participants who identified as male showed OIDPS scores ($M=75.9787$, $SD=9.73673$) and AIS scores ($M=62.8723$, $SD=10.91193$). Both instruments were positively and significantly correlated, $r(47) = .614$, with an effect size of $p < .001$, as seen in Table 9. (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Male Participants – Null Hypotheses Two

Instrument	N	Mean	S.D.
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Male OIDPS	47	75.9787	9.73673
Male AIS	47	62.8723	10.91193

Table 9. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Results of Null Hypotheses Two

Instrument	Correlation	OIDPS Score	AIS Score
OIDPS Total Male Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.614**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	47	47
AIS Total Male Score	Pearson Correlation	.614**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	47	47

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Therefore, the results of Pearson r on RQ2 rejected the null hypothesis H_02 : There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation.

Null Hypotheses Three

Research question three (RQ3) sought to determine if there was a positive or statistically significant relationship between the OIDPS survey responses and the AIS survey responses for female participants. As with RQ1 and RQ2, the researcher used the Pearson r to complete this analysis. As seen in Table 10, the 63 female participants had OIDPS scores ($M=78.0000$, $SD=8.57792$) and AIS scores ($M=61.4286$, $SD=7.92854$). Both instruments were positively and significantly correlated, $r(63) = .502$, with an effect size of $p < .001$, seen in Table 11. (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Female Participants – Null Hypotheses Three

Instrument	N	Mean	S.D.
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Female OIDPS	63	78.0000	8.57792
Female AIS	63	61.4286	7.92854

Table 11. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Results of Null Hypotheses Three

Instrument	Correlation	OIDPS Score	AIS Score
OIDPS Total Female Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	63	63
AIS Total Female Score	Pearson Correlation	.502**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	63	63

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Thus, the results of Pearson r on RQ3 rejected the null hypothesis H_03 : There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation.

Additional Analysis

The AIS portion of the survey instrument asked participants to identify if they had individuals in their family who had attended Southeastern University. Participants were instructed to select as many as applied. The response options were no family attended, spouse's parents, spouse's grandparents, your child(ren), your parents, your grandparents, your siblings.

Table 12 shows the distribution of responses for the group based on each possible option.

Table 12. Family Member Association Responses

Family Member Association	Attended	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
No Family	No	26	23.6	23.6
	Yes	84	76.4	100
	Total	110	100	

Spouse	No	94	85.5	85.5
	Yes	16	14.5	100
	Total	110	100	
Spouse's Parents	No	110	100	100
Spouse's Grandparents	No	110	100	100
Your Child(ren)	No	100	90.9	90.9
	Yes	10	9.1	100
	Total	110	100	
Your Parents	No	107	97.3	97.3
	Yes	3	2.7	100
	Total	110	100	
Your Grandparents	No	110	100	100
Your Sibling(s)	No	106	96.4	96.4
	Yes	4	3.6	100
	Total	110	100	

Data was run to determine the percentage of respondents that had some family members who had attended the University, which identified 26 individuals. A correlation was run on these individuals OI and AIS scores separately. The results of the analysis identified that individuals who had some family members who could have influenced their organizational identity or interest in alumni participation had an effect size that was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). See Table 13. However, at .001 they were no more so than the entire group of respondents with an effect size of $< .001$, as seen in Table 14.

The results of this separate group of participants indicate that family influence did not have a strong impact on student's organizational identity and interest in alumni participation than those who did not have family influence. The fact that there was do difference in the

organizational identity and interest in alumni participation indicates that a student's sense of organizational identity is independent of family influence.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics of Family Influenced Participants

Instrument	N	Mean	S.D.
OIDPS	26	75.2308	9.70488
AIS	26	61.6923	8.31273

Table 14. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of Family Influence

Instrument	Correlation	OIDPS Score	AIS Score
OIDPS Family Influence Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.616**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	26	26
AIS Family Influence Score	Pearson Correlation	.616**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	26	26

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine the strength of the relationship between online, non-traditional, undergraduate students' sense of organizational identity to their higher education institution and their subsequent interest in alumni participation post-graduation. The research further sought to determine if gender played a part the correlation between the same variables in the data. Conducting descriptive statistics using SPSS allowed the answering of all three research questions.

Pearson's r was conducted for all three research questions individually. The hypothesis for research questions one, two, and three was accepted while rejecting the null hypothesis for

each. For research question one all participants were included, regardless of gender to determine if there was a correlation between online, non-traditional, undergraduate sense of organizational identity to their institution and their interest in alumni participation. There was a total of 110 responses for the Organizational Identity and Distinctiveness and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) with scores that ranged from 36 to 94 with a mean OIDPS score of 77.1364 (SD=9.10336). The Alumni Interest Survey (AIS) posted scores ranged from 39 to 92 with a mean AIS score of 62.0455 (SD=9.30166). Research question two singled out the male participants of which there were 47 (43%) of the total 110 respondents. These 47 responses had OIDPS scores ranging from 36 to 90 with a mean score of 75.9787 (SD=9.73673), while AIS scores ranged from 39 to 92 with a mean score of 62.8723 (SD=10.91193). Research question three focused on the female participants of the study which totaled 63 (57%) of the 110 respondents. The 63 female participants had OIDPS scores that ranged from 59 to 64 with a mean OIDPS score of 78.00 (SD=8.57792), and AIS scores ranging from 44 to 80 with a mean of 61.4286 (SD=7.92854).

As a part of the AIS portion of the survey, each participant responded to the members of their family or their spouses' family who attended Southeastern University. Each participant was allowed to check any that applied to them. Of the 110 responses, 76.4% responded that no family members had attended, 14.5% reported their spouse had attended, 10% reported their children had attended, 3.6% reported their sibling(s) had attended, and 2.7% reported their parents had attended the University. The three additional responses available were: did your spouses' parents attend, did your spouse's grandparents attend, did your grandparents attend. Each of these questions had a 0.0% response rate.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The number of online, non-traditional students at American higher education institutions has been rising steadily for many years, and data projection numbers indicate that it will continue to do so (Allen & Seaman, 2010a). With the average student age increasing on college campuses, and more specifically, in online programs, it is important for higher education to ensure that these students still have a strong sense of connectedness to their institution, as well as a strong desire to participate as alumni after graduation. The work of Mael (1988) and others has shown the importance of organizational identity to an institution. Institutions such as Western Governors University have shown that it is possible to achieve organizational identity effectively in a completely online environment.

The increase of non-traditional, online students in higher education motivated the research for this study. The additional opportunities that this demographic of student can present to alumni activities and funding, further motivate this study. However, there is very little research on this student population, making it challenging to know if they feel connected to their institution, and if so, how to meet their needs and interests in the area of alumni participation. The researcher of this study sought to fill the gap in the literature by taking the concept of organizational identity and alumni involvement that has been completed previously with traditional age students in traditional classrooms and conduct a study that correlates the two variables with online, non-traditional, undergraduate students through a combined survey.

Discussion

The purpose of this non-experimental correlational study was to determine if there is a significant relationship between non-traditional, online students' level of organizational identity to their alma mater and their interest in participating in alumni programs. Thus building up the

research of previous studies such as Stephenson and Yerger (2014) who have shown that it is important for students to feel a strong sense of organizational identity to their institution to desire association with the institution after graduation. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Harud (2011) indicated that organizational identity is even more important in online learning environments to make up for the lack of direct contact that students receive in a traditional learning opportunity. Limited research was available to determine the organizational level of online non-traditional students. Thus, the research conducted here sought to provide a gap in the literature that would determine if the strong sense of identity that these researchers have identified as important to encourage alumni participation after graduation existed in online, non-traditional students. Additionally, the research provided data outlining the correlation between organizational identity levels and subsequent alumni interest for non-traditional, online students that can add to the research of Jussila, Byrne, and Tuominen (2012), Love (2013), Newman and Petrosko (2011) and Farrow and Yuan (2011). While there are many studies available on traditionally aged students enrolled in traditional classroom programs, the researcher sought to shed light on the non-traditional, online student. This chapter provides a review and summary of the correlational research conducted, and provide an analysis of the results.

Research Question One

The first research question for this study sought to determine if there was a correlation between the organizational identity level of online, non-traditional, undergraduate students and their interest in participation in an alumni association after graduation. This study found there was a significance between the non-traditional, online, undergraduate students' level of organizational identity and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. Thus rejecting the null hypothesis H_01 : There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational

identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. The fact that there is a statistical significance between an online, non-traditional, undergraduates sense of connectedness to their university and their alumni participation supports the research of Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (2001) who indicated the need for such identity in non-traditional learners. The results of the data also support the recent Gallup-Purdue Index (2014) that identified students who attend completely online universities can still have a strong sense of organizational identity to their institution.

Research Question Two

The second research question sought to determine if there was a correlation between the organizational identity level of online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students and their interest in participation in an alumni association after graduation. This research found that there was a correlation between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. Thus, rejecting the null hypothesis, H_02 : There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate male students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. It is interesting to note that men showed a slightly higher correlation than women, although not considerably higher. Male respondents had a higher mean score on the AIS scale than females. The fact that there is a statistical significance between an online, non-traditional, undergraduates males sense of connectedness to their university and their alumni participation supports the research of Ashong and Commander (2012) and Albert and Johnson (2011) who indicated that both males and females had high positive perceptions of their online learning experiences.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked if there was a correlation between the organizational identity level of online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students and their interest in participation in an alumni association after graduation. The research indicated that while not at as high a level as men, there was a correlation between the level of organizational identity of women and their subsequent interest in alumni activities after graduation. Again, rejecting the null hypothesis H₀₃: There is no statistical significance between the level of organizational identity in online, non-traditional, undergraduate female students and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. Additionally, the females did show a higher OIDPS score than males. Once again the fact that there is a statistical significance between an online, non-traditional, undergraduate female's sense of connectedness to their university and their alumni participation supports the research of Ashong and Commander (2012) where women reported higher mean scores on all subscales of their online connectedness study than their male counterparts.

In summary, this research supports the idea that presence at a physical location, such as a college campus, is not necessary for students to feel engaged and identify with their institution. Rather, it shows that sense of connectedness is achievable in ways other than a traditional on-campus experience provides. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that adults do not need the same types of engagement to feel connected, or perhaps that the increased use of technology in our lives has created a new sense of connectedness that we have not experienced in the past. While this study does not predict the causal effect of the two variables, the data show a correlation between a strong sense of organizational identity and subsequent involvement level in alumni participation. Therefore, it is important that higher education institutions ensure that they

are providing the necessary sense of connectedness and identity to all students, in all classroom formats, to promote the continuance and growth of their alumni support base.

An additional area of the study that was found to be interesting were the questions on the AIS survey that sought to know what family member's connections they had who also attended the same higher education institution. While the data were not separated out for this study, the data indicated that it could be a variable of interest. Of the 110 responses, 76.4% responded that no family members had attended the University. However the remaining 23.6% did have family who had attended the same university, and of that 23.7%, 2.7% indicated that they had family members who fit into more than one category.

Conclusion

The researcher rejected the null hypothesis for all research questions in this study, as the data indicated that there is a significant relationship between online, non-traditional students' sense of connectedness to their institution and their interest in alumni participation after graduation. This relationship between connectedness and alumni participation indicates that non-traditional students can develop a strong enough sense of organizational identity to their online university that would lead them to have an interest in alumni participation. Additionally, that sense of connectedness and eventual interest in alumni participation is achievable without any physical connection to the brick and mortar campus environment. The correlation between the level of organizational identity and alumni interest had support by the combined survey population, as well as male and female populations when looked at separately. This overall positive relationship between the variables indicates that both male and female students have organizational identity levels that correlate with their involvement level in alumni participation, and are not gender specific in any way. When looking at the specific responses of the

participants, it is interesting to note that students who had a family connection to the university did not show notably higher organizational identity and alumni involvement correlation levels than those without a family connection to the University. The absence of family influence on correlation levels confirms that a strong sense of organizational identity is achievable in online, non-traditional students who are completing their undergraduate degrees without any outside influence from individuals other than the engagement and contact offered through the online educational process. This information can be very beneficial to higher education institutions when developing online programs. It is important for students to have a strong sense of identity to the institution, for their personal performance as well as their connection to the institution after graduation. It is a necessary part of ensuring that the learning environment will encourage all graduates to participate in alumni activities after graduation. All graduates are capable of having a strong interest in alumni activities, regardless of the mode in which they completed their studies. When designing online programs with organizational identity building practices in place, both the student and the institution can benefit long-term.

Implications

Higher education has been moving towards a greater number of online education offerings, and according to Allen and Seaman (2010a), the trend is growing. According to Lundberg (2003), the steady incline of non-traditional learners accounted for approximately 40% of all college students. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education (2013) identified that non-traditional learners would have a 14% increase over the next five years, making non-traditional students the majority participant in higher education. This new “normal” student could be a cause of concern for higher education in the area of alumni participation and support. Because traditional universities rely heavily upon alumni, it is important for them to identify

ways to ensure that the non-traditional, online student identifies strongly enough with their institution and that desire to participate in alumni activities exist. However, the responsibility to engage students of all types at a level that would generate a strong sense of identity is the responsibility of the individual institution (Li, 2013).

The implication is that online, non-traditional students would not feel a strong connection to their institution and would, therefore, be less inclined to participate as an alumnus after graduation. However, in the study by Lim, Morris, and Kupritz (2007), students who participated in online learning classes showed a higher level of perceived and actual learning. Thus showing us that once accepted the fact that traditional classroom learning is higher than that of online learning is not only false but in fact, traditional classroom, learning is lower than those in the online learning environment. In a study by the Gallup-Purdue Index (2014) the idea of student engagement among online students received notice when completely online students at Western Governors University rated almost two times higher than traditional students in their emotional attachment to their university. All of which discounted the research of Bolinger and Inan (2012) whose research indicated that online students had a weaker sense of connectedness and belonging to their institution than their traditional counterparts did.

Drouin and Vartanian (2010) did compare students' sense of community between online and traditional campus students providing us with data to prove that there was no difference in the students' sense of connectedness in these two learning environments. However, no research was available to determine if online, non-traditional students' sense of connectedness was at a level that would make them more involved in alumni participation after they graduated. While the Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS), as well as the Alumni Involvement Survey (AIS), were designed for research on traditional students, for the purpose of

this study, they applied to non-traditional, online students to learn important information about a new demographic of student. The results of this study confirmed the results of others who have researched online students and their sense of connectedness. The research then went a step further to focus on the growing population of non-traditional students to determine if there was a correlation between the non-traditional, online student's sense of connectedness and their interest in alumni participation post-graduation, which is an important question for higher education alumni associations across the United States.

Limitations

While the controls outlined in Chapter One ensured the internal validity of this study, some limitations to the external validity exist. First, the use of a survey instrument utilizes a self-reporting means that relies on experience. Anytime self-reporting is utilized in research; it can be a limitation, as outside circumstances are uncontrollable and can influence the individual's responses on any given day. While the data from this research indicated that there was a positive correlation between the two variables; Organizational Identity, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale (OIDPS) and the Alumni Interest Survey (AIS), it is limited in that the study only looked at the data received from one single institution. Another limitation is in the fact that the data came from a sample of undergraduate, non-traditional, online students; thus not giving an overall view of the entire population pool available. Because all participants were graduates of a religious based institution, this again poses a limitation which could indicate that the results might not be generalizable to other schools due to faith-based or cultural factors beyond the range of this study. Because there were no questions that identified the extent that the participants' faith had on their sense of identity to their institution we cannot rule out the possibility that it played a part in the outcome results. Additionally, while this institution has specific religious doctrines that it

teaches, there is a diversity of religious beliefs of the individual students, and because the sample of participants was a random homogeneous grouping, we also cannot generalize the findings to be representative of all religious colleges as well. Another limitation of this study was the total number of participants. While the study indicated that these non-traditional, online, undergraduate students did show a correlation between organizational identity and alumni involvement levels, it is still not determined if online, non-traditional, undergraduate students have correlational levels that compare to that of their traditional-aged and on-campus counterparts. Finally, this study is a correlational study, which did not indicate cause and effect but rather only a relationship between the two variables. Thus, this limits the study in that we are still not certain if in this sample higher levels of organizational identity can affect the eventual alumni participation of graduates, and therefore become a predictor for higher education institutions to use. We simply see that there is a correlation between OIDPS and AIS scores for online, non-traditional undergraduate participants of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further research would come in several different approaches. Initially, it is important to do additional research on the online, non-traditional student population in general, as very little research is available on this student demographic. With numbers of students who are non-traditional in age, continue growing, it is more important than ever to understand how this type of student will influence the future of alumni association participation. It would be beneficial to conduct the same research presented here at additional institutions with large online, non-traditional student populations. Conducting a similar study at additional universities across the country would provide additional understanding of the nationwide correlation of online, non-traditional, undergraduate students' sense of organizational identity to

their institution and alumni participation. When looking at the number of participants who indicated that they did have family members who had attended the same university, it could also be beneficial to conduct additional research to determine the impact that familial connection might have on overall student connectedness and eventual alumni interest after graduation. An additional recommendation would be to address the faith-based limitation by conducting research that compares the organizational identity of online, non-traditional students from a faith-based institution to those online, non-traditional students at a non-faith based institution to determine if the outcomes are different when faith is not a factor. A final suggestion for additional research would be to conduct interviews in a qualitative study of online, non-traditional students. The study should attempt to determine what factors influenced the students' level of organizational identity and those alumni activities that would encourage them to participate more actively in an alumni program after graduation. It would also be valuable to know what types of alumni activities they would be most likely to be involved.

Additional research such as have been mentioned here would provide higher education institutions which currently have, or are considering increasing their online degree offerings, with valuable information. The information would provide the institution with data that would help to understand the importance of organizational identity, and how organizational identity can impact the longevity of their institution through alumni participation. The value that university alumni members bring to the higher education institution is well recognized; however, additional research on how the online, non-traditional student defines the alumni role still needs additional research to meet their needs for future alumni development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

(Reproduced with permission, see Appendix D)

**Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness, and
Prestige Scale Items**

	Very Weak	Weak	Neutral	Strong	Very Strong
When someone criticizes Liberty University, it feels like a personal insult.	1	2	3	4	5
I am very interested in what others think about Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
When I talk about Liberty University, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”	1	2	3	4	5
Liberty University’s successes are my successes.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone praises Liberty University, it feels like a personal compliment.	1	2	3	4	5
If a story in the media criticized Liberty University, I would feel embarrassed.	1	2	3	4	5
When I think about Liberty University, the availability of service programs seems unique from other schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5
Liberty University programs are unique compared to programs available at other online schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5

Liberty University is unique compared to other schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5
The presence of professing Christians as professors at Liberty University seems unique from the faculty at other schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5
The theology requirement at Liberty University makes it unique from other schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5
Liberty University's mission of developing the whole person (integrating intellectual, personal, ethical, and religious formation) is unique from the mission of other schools considered to be most competitive.	1	2	3	4	5
Liberty University has unique characteristics compared to other most competitive schools.	1	2	3	4	5
Liberty University is considered one of the best schools that I applied.	1	2	3	4	5
Alumni of all schools that I applied to would be proud to have their children attend Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5

	Very Strong	Strong	Neutral	Weak	Very Weak
People from other schools that I applied to look down at Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5

Liberty University does not have a good reputation in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
A person seeking to advance his/her career in their chosen industry should downplay his/her association with Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
When other organizations are recruiting new employees, they would not want students from Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

Alumni Involvement Survey

(Reproduced with permission, see Appendix F)

DIRECTIONS: Please select the appropriate response or write in your response in the space provided next to or below each statement or question below.

1. Please check the boxes that correspond to your family members who attended Liberty University. (check all that apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> N/A – None of these family attended LU | <input type="checkbox"/> Your child(ren) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Your parent(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your spouse’s parent(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Your grandparent(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your spouse’s grandparent(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Your sibling(s) |

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = never and 5 = very frequently, circle the one number that represents the frequency in which you participate in each of the activities listed below.

	Never	Very Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
Return to the Liberty University campus when possible.	1	2	3	4	5
Attend Liberty University athletic events.	1	2	3	4	5
Wear Liberty University apparel.	1	2	3	4	5
Read alumni publications.	1	2	3	4	5
Attend a Liberty University event.	1	2	3	4	5
Watch Liberty University athletic events on television.	1	2	3	4	5
Volunteer for Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
Seek out information about fellow Liberty University alumni.	1	2	3	4	5
Visit a Liberty University website.	1	2	3	4	5
Wear a Liberty University class ring.	1	2	3	4	5
Interact with fellow Liberty University alumni (excluding family members).	1	2	3	4	5

Speak positively about Liberty University to others.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

3. Are you aware of other individuals (excluding family members) who contribute financially to Liberty University? (check one):
 Yes No
4. Are you aware of other individuals (excluding family members) who participate in the Liberty University Alumni activities? (check one):
 Yes No
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, circle the one number that represents your level of agreement with each statement listed below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find value in my education from Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
I am proud to be an alum of Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
I would recommend Liberty University to others.	1	2	3	4	5
I have positive feelings about Liberty University.	1	2	3	4	5
I want others to know I am a Liberty University alum.	1	2	3	4	5
My Liberty University education has improved my life.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C**Jones and Volpe (2011) Instrument Approval Letter**

I have received approval from Dr. Jones.

On Monday, Apr 20, 2015, at 2:29 PM, Candace Jones [REDACTED] wrote:

Mary Hendrick <[REDACTED]>; Volpe, Elizabeth <[REDACTED]>

Dear Mary,

Thank you for your inquiry. I believe that Elizabeth Volpe also needs to be consulted about using the scale. If it is all right with Elizabeth, it is fine with me, and Elizabeth can send you the scale if this is the case.

Good luck with your research!

Candace

Candace Jones
Associate Professor, Organization and Management Dept, [REDACTED]
By Courtesy, Sociology Dept
140 Commonwealth Ave, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] USA

On Mon, Apr 20, 2015, at 4:59 AM, Mary Hendrick <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dr. Jones:

My name is Mary Hendrick, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am planning to do my dissertation on Organizational Identity and the Online Non-Traditional Undergraduate Student: The Impact on Alumni Participation. I want to use your Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale that you adapted from Mael (1988) along with Dr. Volpe. Can I have your permission to use your Scale in my research? I appreciate your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Mary C. Hendrick, M.S. Ed.

APPENDIX D**Jones and Volpe (2011) Instrument Publication Approval Letter**

I have received approval from Dr. Jones.

Publication of dissertation including your Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale

JONES Candace <[REDACTED]>
Today, 11:44 AM

Hi Mary,

Thank you for the follow up and we appreciate your usage of the scale and proper citation to it.

best wishes

Candace Jones
Chair Global Creative Enterprise

University of Edinburgh Business School

[REDACTED]
Edinburgh, EH8 9JS, UK
Tele: [REDACTED]

email: Candace.Jones@ed.ac.uk
Hendrick, Mary
[REDACTED]

Dr. Jones:

In 2015 you gave your permission for me use your Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale instrument in my dissertation research. I am happy to report that my dissertation is completed and I have successfully defended it for my committee. I am now required to submit my dissertation for publication in my colleges institutional repository, and I am seeking your permission to publish your instrument along with my research. I assure you that I will cite you appropriately.

Sincerely,

Mary C. Hendrick, Ed.D.

APPENDIX E**Newman (2009) Instrument Approval Letter**

Re: Organizational Identity Scale

Tue 1/6/2015 10:58 AM

Newman, Melissa [REDACTED] Hendrick, Mary;

Hi, Mary:

Attached is my complete dissertation, which includes the scale. Yes, feel free to use it. Best of luck!

Regards,
Melissa

On Dec 30, 2014, at 6:38 PM, "Hendrick, Mary" [REDACTED] wrote:

Dr. Newman:

My name is Mary Hendrick, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, who currently lives in the Indianapolis, Indiana area. I am conducting my dissertation on Organizational identity and the online non-traditional student: The impact on alumni participation. I want to use the Organizational Identity Likert scale that you used in your "Predictors of Alumni Association Membership" study with Dr. Petrosko in 2010, table 7.

Because the population for my study will be students, who are enrolled in a completely online university where there is no physical brick and mortar institution with which to connect. Due to this fact, some of the questions on your scale would not apply to this demographic of students. My question to you is twofold: 1) Can I receive a copy of your instrument, and 2) Can I have your permission to make adjustments to the instrument to only ask the questions that would pertain to this type of alumni situation?

If you have any specific questions or concerns for me, you can reach me by email at: [REDACTED] Email is the best method by which to send a copy of the instrument as well.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mary C. Hendrick

APPENDIX F**Newman (2009) Instrument Publication Approval Letter**

Organizational Identity Scale

Newman, Melissa ([REDACTED]) < [REDACTED] >
Thu 7/27, 10:27 AM

Sure, go for it. Congrats on finishing!

Sent from my iPhone

Hendrick, Mary
Newman, Melissa ([REDACTED]) < [REDACTED] >

Dr. Newman:

In 2015 you gave your permission for me use your Alumni Involvement Survey instrument in my dissertation research. I am happy to report that my dissertation is completed and I have successfully defended it for my committee. I am now required to submit my dissertation for publication in my colleges institutional repository, and I am seeking your permission to publish your instrument along with my research. I assure you that I will cite you appropriately.

Sincerely,

Mary C. Hendrick, Ed.D.

APPENDIX G

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 5, 2015

Mary C. Hendrick
 IRB Exemption 2319.110515: The Organizational Identity of Online, Non-Traditional,
 Undergraduate Students and its Relationship to Alumni Participation

Dear Mary,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
 Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
 The Graduate School

LIBERTY
 UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX H

Dear (Student first and last name):

You have been selected along with other Liberty University graduates to receive an invitation to complete an Organizational Identity and Alumni Survey.

As a graduate student in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral Degree. The purpose of my research is to determine if there is a correlation between the organizational identity level of online non-traditional undergraduate students and their interest in participating in an alumni association after graduation. Additionally, the purpose is to determine if there is a correlation between the organizational identity of online non-traditional undergraduate students and their interest in participating in an alumni association after graduation when considering gender. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

A consent document is included as the first page you will see when you click on the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it. Please click on the survey link at the end of the consent information to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The deadline to complete the survey is **March 18, 2016**.

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to begin the survey.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Mary Hendrick

Doctoral Candidate



APPENDIX I

Survey Agreement Page

The purpose of this research project is to determine if there is a correlation between a non-traditional online undergraduate students' level of Organizational Identity with their University has any relationship between their interest in alumni participation. This is a research project being conducted by Mary Hendrick, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a non-traditional student who attended Liberty University in a completely online program.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdrawal from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 30 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. The survey questions will be about your

We will do our best to keep your information confidential. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. The surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you, to help protect your confidentiality. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with Liberty University representatives.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Mary Hendrick at [REDACTED]. This research has been reviewed according to Liberty University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have ready the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

-
- agree
 disagree

**Click here to begin
survey**

APPENDIX J

Reminder Email for survey

Dear Student:

If you have not already done so, please take time today to complete the Organizational Identity and Alumni Survey.

As a graduate student in the Education department at Liberty University, Mary Hendrick is conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is **March 18, 2016**.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete the online survey. It should take approximately 30 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required. All participants will be eligible to win one of five \$50.00 Visa Gift Cards.

To participate, click on the link provided at the bottom of this email.

An informed consent document is provided as the first page you will see after clicking on the survey link. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it. Rather, please click on the survey link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to take part in the survey.

The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The deadline to complete the survey is **March 18, 2016**.

[CLICK HERE](#) to begin your survey now.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Liberty University Alumni Association

on behalf of:

Mary Hendrick

Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

APPENDIX K**Second Reminder Email**

Survey Reminder



This is a reminder to please complete your Organizational Identity and Alumni Survey. If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation and please disregard this notice.

As a graduate student in the Education department at Liberty University, Mary Hendrick is conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. Two weeks ago an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The **deadline for participation is March 18, 2016.**

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete the online survey. It should take approximately 30 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required. Additionally, all participants will be entered into a random drawing to win one of 5 \$50.00 Visa gift cards. To participate, click on the link provided at the bottom of this email.

An informed consent document is provided on the first page you will see after clicking on the survey link. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it. Rather, please click on the survey link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to take part in the survey.

Thank you for helping!

Liberty University Alumni Association

On behalf of:

Mary Hendrick

Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University