

A Study of Alumni Engagement and Satisfaction as Related to
Alumni Volunteerism and Philanthropy

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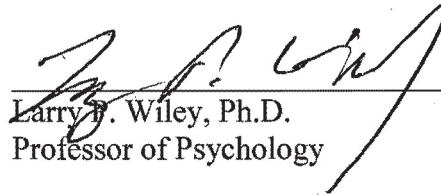
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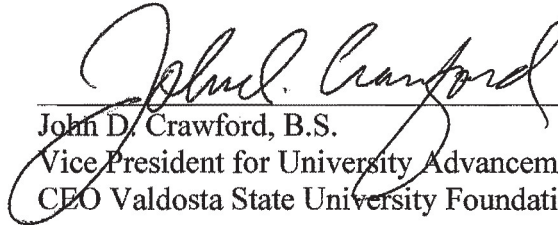
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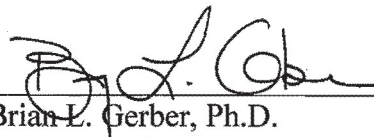


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ABSTRACT

This is a study of factors and issues that influence alumni satisfaction and engagement. It is formatted as a journal-ready dissertation composed of two studies. The first study examined factors impacting alumni satisfaction and engagement at a rural state college and offered direction for all institutions in an era when competition for students, dollars, and favored political assistance is exceptionally high. The second study examined motivation factors of alumni from the same state college and how these factors impacted alumni volunteerism and philanthropy. It also incorporated validated motivational theories to better understand the why, what, and when of alumni engagement.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is prepared in a journal-ready format. The first part of the dissertation contains two journal-ready articles which have been prepared for submission to refereed journals. The complete proposal for this study is found in Appendix A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Higher Education is the door to unlimited opportunities, providing instruction for life both in and out of the classroom. I thank God for the freedom of access to this foundational pillar of our country and I acknowledge that it is He who has granted me the ability and privilege to be a part of such as both student and professional.

It is my parents who provided me with the basic principles for life as well as the expectation to succeed. I am grateful. I am especially indebted to my family – my wife, Stephanie, and our children, Ben, Laney, Brooks, and Ellie Kate – for allowing me to attempt and complete this particular endeavor. Because of you I am a better husband, dad, and professional.

To those who have or will seek to enhance life for others through education, my admiration and appreciation for you and our work is high. To those who pioneered the advancement field, I owe a great deal of gratitude and to those with whom I have had the privilege of serving, thank you for providing opportunities and inspiration. You have made the path exciting and meaningful.

Without my committee this work would not have been possible. Each person provided unique assistance and I am indebted to you for helping me navigate this passage. May higher education reap any benefits produced.

Finally, this work is in memory of Dr. Philip L. Gunter, a consummate educator whose belief in people provided vision for generations.

Running head: SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Student Experience Factors Related to Alumni Satisfaction and Engagement

Abstract

The student experience and the alumni relationship provide the framework for lifelong engagement with one's alma mater. General factors affecting satisfaction and involvement include family history, age, and capacity, while other influential variables are found only during the student's collegiate years. This study examined factors impacting alumni satisfaction and engagement at a small, rural institution and offers direction for all institutions in an era when competition for students, dollars, and favored political assistance is exceptionally high. Among several significant findings, this study revealed the positive relationship between student involvement in college-sanctioned extracurricular activities, leadership positions held in student clubs and organizations, and academic recognition for students as these relate alumni engagement. The study also reflected prior findings that indicate alumni satisfaction with the student experience increases the likelihood of alumni volunteerism and philanthropy. Additionally, the study revealed that former students may be more inclined than previously thought to support efforts aimed at priorities for outside-the-classroom learning opportunities and hands-on experiences related to academic disciplines.

Student Experience Factors Related to Alumni Satisfaction and Engagement

Institutions of higher learning are experiencing increased pressures from simultaneous challenges involving the intensification of competition for new students, reductions in traditional budget-based funding allocations, and the increased need to seek funding from external sources in order to meet their financial obligations. From student recruitment to alumni involvement, higher education institutions rely on a lifecycle of connections. As Hummel (2001) observed, recruitment is a vital first step in a potential lifelong journey for the student and the higher education institution. The collegiate years offer ample opportunities for involvement, producing learning and development possibilities for the connected student (Astin, 1999). Student involvement is a major predictor of a graduate's engagement as an alumnus, encompassing involvement in fundraising, political concerns, mentoring, and volunteering (Weertz & Ronca, 2008). This continuous connection from student recruit to engaged alumnus is significantly important for institutions as these schools can benefit from graduates' devotion and loyalty to enhance their lifelong connections to the institution.

Small, rural colleges are faced with even greater challenges in these areas due to geographic location and service areas which often lead to smaller student bodies and produce an alumni base with a limited number of graduates. However, these schools can also use to their advantage the graduates' student experiences and their devotion and loyalty as alumni to enhance their lifelong connections to the institution.

This continuous connection from student recruit to engaged alumnus is significantly more important for small, rural state institutions as enrollment has increased

and state funding has decreased over the past several years (Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, 2008, 2009, 2010). Because of restricted recruitment resources, traditionally smaller student bodies, and limited alumni counts, these schools must concentrate on creating a positive undergraduate experience that can be extrapolated throughout the alumni duration to provide enriched lifelong affiliation with the institution (Weerts & Ronca, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to examine general factors as well as student experience factors that have the greatest relationships with alumni engagement and satisfaction. Because one of the highest levels of alumni commitment is through financial contributions to the institution, variables associated with alumni philanthropy were analyzed. Additionally, other means of volunteering by graduates can be just as important for institutions (recruiting new students, political advocacy, etc.), so these, too, were collectively examined. This research will help institutions better meet the needs and expectations of its students, thus providing future engagement opportunities for alumni. The resulting conclusions of the study should also prove beneficial for extrapolation to other institutions.

For this particular study, satisfaction was defined as how well the alumnus was satisfied with his time as a student at the institution and how satisfied he is as a graduate since these factors relate to his perceptions and frames of reference toward the institution. Engagement was characterized as the alumnus' intentional connection to the institution on the basis of volunteering and/or donating resources to the college. Motivation was expressed by inclination to participate in alumni volunteering and/or donating.

General Factors of Influence

Political science, sociology, and social psychology offer expansive assessments with regards to factors related to a person's involvement with non-profits. Penner's (2002) definition of volunteerism included the lasting, non-mandatory, deliberate pro-communal conduct that benefits others and commonly occurs in society. The literature suggested that volunteerism is shaped by multiple factors, including family history and culture, experiences from youth to adulthood, family demographics, the individual's age, collegiate experiences, and affinity for the institution (Beeler, 1982; Dugan, Millin, & Siegfried, 2000; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Rusbult, 1980; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001; and Zuzanek & Smale, 1999).

Studies by Dunham and Bengston (1992) as well as Zaff, Moore, Papillo, and Williams (2003) indicated that it is often civically-engaged parents who influence their children to volunteer, both by being role models for them and volunteers with them. The child experiences volunteerism and, hence, frequently becomes a volunteer like the parents. Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1999) posited that adult volunteers likely come from upper socioeconomic backgrounds and have prior volunteer service experience. Still, other studies pointed to socializing influences which promote collective values for the societal good as influencers of volunteerism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Serow and Dreyden (1990) asserted that involvement in religious activities is associated with more probable involvement in public service.

Weerts and Ronca (2009) noted the influences of youth experiences on adult volunteerism. For example, Ladewig and Thomas (1987) observed that participation in 4-H and other youth organizations was a predictor of membership and leadership in civic associations in adulthood. Wentzel and McNamara (as cited by Weerts & Ronca, 2009) discovered that community-related conduct was evident in students as early as middle school when those students had positive relationships with other students. Several studies linked volunteerism by high school students to a likelihood of volunteerism in young adulthood (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Glanville, 1999; Zaff et al., 2003). Astin (1999) further determined that volunteer work in college correlated positively with volunteer work after college completion. Brown and Ferris (2007) found that there was a greater propensity for volunteer activities in relation to the amount of college completed, with college graduates participating in almost five more volunteer experiences annually than those without college experiences. Among persons age 25 and over, 42.3% of college graduates volunteered in 2010, compared to 17.9% of high school graduates, and 8.8% of those with less than a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Grube and Piliavin (2000) suggested that the more satisfied a person is with an organization, the greater her likelihood to volunteer for that organization.

Weerts and Ronca (2009) asserted that the likelihood of volunteer engagement correlated to ability and demographic qualities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), women volunteered at a higher rate than men across age groups, education levels, and other major determining factors. Shaw and Taylor (1995) noted that these gender disparities correspond with higher education philanthropy, signifying

that women are more likely to volunteer at higher education institutions than men, particularly in regards to donations. In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reported persons in the age range of 35-44 are most likely to volunteer while persons in their early twenties were least likely to volunteer. This study further noted that parents with children age 18 or under are substantially more likely to volunteer (33.6%) than persons without children (23.5%). These factors impact discretionary/leisure time and use according to Zuzanek and Smale (1999).

Student Involvement Influences

Student involvement is a major predictor of a graduate's engagement as an alumnus, including involvement in fundraising, political concerns, mentoring, and volunteering (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The overall student experience plays a key role in the development of former students' desire to give back to their institution (Pumerantz, 2005). Engaged alumni directly and indirectly provide positive impacts on their alma maters by giving their time and resources (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Alumni of rural-based schools often refer to their alma maters with passion and conviction, using terms such as "family," "opportunity," "dedicated professors," and "work ethic" (Barber, 2010).

Student involvement at the undergraduate level plays a significant role in the enrichment of the whole student. Abrahamowicz (as cited in Hunt & Rentz, 1994) asserted that such involvement positively affects students' overall gratification with the collegiate experience, cultivates further pursuit of academics, and enhances personal growth and maturity. Astin's Student Involvement Theory (originally published in 1984

and reprinted in 1999) captured multiple aspects of college which impacted student involvement, concluding that the more involved the student, the more he will learn and develop as an individual. Miller and Jones (as cited in Fitch, 1991) made a strong statement for extracurricular, outside-the-classroom programs, going so far as to state they should be viewed as fundamental elements of the curriculum. Colleges which engage their students will find that the students are more positively impacted, preparing them for a likelihood of support after graduation.

Influences on student learning and personal growth are connected to student achievement. The impact of student residence, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and student-faculty interaction influence student development (Astin, 1999). Participation in Greek organizations, general clubs and organizations, peer interaction, and employment also has influences on students (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999). Feldman and Newcomb's 1994 review of more than 1,500 studies further substantiated the effect that college has on students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. In addition, Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested alumni donors may be more inclined to provide volunteer time if they received financial help as students. In contrast, a report derived from a fifteen year analysis of a private institution concluded that students who take out loans and those who receive scholarships are less likely to donate than peers who received no assistance (Meer & Rosen, 2012). Colleges would do well to take note of those positive connectors and seek ways to integrate them into campus objectives.

Motivational theories can be applied to student involvement. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory explained how specific needs drive people at particular life stages. He stated, "The appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need" (p. 370). The level of "belongingness and love needs" best represents involved students in that they share a connection through attachment, assimilation, group association, and community networks (Hummel, 2001). Dewey's epic 1897 "My Pedagogic Creed" is also relevant to student involvement. Dewey stated "that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals" (p. 35). He further noted that "all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race...and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas, and arousing his feelings and emotions" (p. 34). Astin (1999) provided further support for this perspective when, referring to the individualized (eclectic) theory. He noted that no single method is adequately used to instruct all persons, but the best approach is a flexible one to teach individuals.

Rural state colleges should consider and develop these concepts to assist the student in finding success, thereby reinforcing a positive attitude toward the institution. Pumerantz (2005) succinctly declared, "Happy students make happy alumni." (p. 290). For small, rural colleges, the capacity and inclination of alumni to give and to volunteer is very important. This impacts the decision of when and how to approach alumni for their services (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Noting the importance of student satisfaction from both in-classroom and outside-classroom curricula (Astin, 1999), institutions can

augment feelings of belonging, self-actualization, and positive emotions that will benefit both the student and the institution. These are especially important to the rural-based college which counts on its current and former students to share their testimonies and experiences for the purpose of engaging alumni to recruit new students and involve other graduates (Barber, 2010).

The student experience connection begins even prior to entry into the institution. Recruitment is a vital first step in a potential lifelong journey between the student and the higher education institution. Hummel (2001) noted that the recruitment process is the initial connecting point for the student, while Baade and Sundberg (1996) contended that an institution's admissions policy has a clear impact on alumni engagement. Once recruited and subsequently admitted, Astin (1999) argued that the more a student is involved in college, the more education and individual growth he has. Student involvement is a major predictor of a graduate's engagement as an alumnus, including involvement in fundraising, political concerns, mentoring, and volunteering (Weertz & Ronca, 2008).

Methods

Procedures

This study used quantitative methods to answer the research question: *What general factors and factors in the student experience are related to alumni engagement and satisfaction?* Two assumptions were made: 1) the foundation for alumni engagement is established by general factors related to an individual (Weerts & Ronca,

2009) and 2) alumni engagement is related to the student college experience (Pumerantz, 2005).

Similar studies have been conducted by others. This study's theoretical basis of content was modeled after a study reported by Hummel (2001). However, the gathering of data and methods of analysis were distinctly different from Hummel's effort. This study also differed from Hummel's work in that the scope and mission of the institution in focus is different and therefore the students and alumni are different. Additionally, Hummel's original study examined a 43-year-old Canadian university in a large metropolitan city, while this one focused on a 104-year-old state college in rural, South Georgia, United States. To more accurately reflect the institution of focus, questions within the instrument itself differed from Hummel's study.

A survey comprised of a combination of 30 yes/no questions and check lists was used to address factors related to the target population. Likert scales were used to address factors related to alumni motivation for engagement and factors related to alumni satisfaction. To maximize understanding of the respondents, some questions included the option of "other." The final question was optional and open-ended in nature. To improve response times and data conversion rates (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004), an invitation to the survey (including a Web link to the instrument) was delivered electronically by e-mail and simultaneously made available on the college's Facebook page. This provided the greatest opportunity for contact with the target population (Pew Research Center, 2012). A pre-determined date was selected to boost maximum response (Hamilton, 2011; PeoplePulse, 2011). A reminder e-mail to the same population with the

same link was administered six days after the initial contact. The survey was available for 11 days.

Variables

Variables were categorized into four concentrations. Demographic data such as age, race, gender, degree, and residence were sought. Social and academic involvement during the student years addressed the student experience. These included activities such as involvement in student clubs and organizations, student leadership, scholarship, and academic recognition. Alumni engagement was based on volunteering and donating. Volunteers and donors were represented by characteristics such as contact with the institution, participation in alumni programs, and philanthropic efforts. The alumni motivation section determined emotional and motivating factors associated with alumni by asking about the college's reputation, appreciation for the college, and desire to support students.

Participants

This research was conducted at a rural state college with an alumni population of approximately 42,000. A convenience sample of 6,500 possible respondents was selected based on valid e-mail addresses in the alumni database at the time of the study. Measures were taken to ensure anonymity and to indicate that the survey had been approved by the college.

Of those sampled, 302 (5%) chose to participate in this study. Results indicated the respondents were 57.9% male and 94.0% Caucasian with 72.5% first arriving at the college less than one year after completing high school. More than 66% of respondents

were enrolled in the college for two years and 70.2% lived in on-campus housing.

Agriculture was the most popular degree (29.8%) and 75.8% of the respondents completed the Associates degree at the college in some discipline. A Bachelor's degree at another institution was completed by 63.2% of those who responded.

This research protocol was exempt from Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category 2.

Limitations

The sample for this study was limited to the alumni for whom the focus institution had valid e-mail addresses. Graduates for whom there was no e-mail address were equally important to the institution and may have been engaged with the college. This latter group was absent from this study, but would have provided equally important data for this research.

The study was also limited by using retrospective data, having participants recall and interpret past events. This type of data collection risked distortion of the results due to time since the respondent was a student or was involved with the college as an alumnus. Attitudes might have changed over time, and emotional needs may have influenced people to alter their past to justify decisions or behaviors. For some respondents, a survey item or situational instances (such as economic adversity) might have prompted an altered response. Both negative and positive experiences might have been interpreted in a distorted manner as the respondent recalled them from his past.

Alumni donor status was determined by whether or not the participant had contributed to the college or the college's foundation. No information was requested

regarding the size of the financial contribution, therefore dollar value variables were not present. These could have provided the most relevant information for the college as this information could be used to measure financial impacts and future uses of funds by the college.

Researcher bias in this study must be acknowledged. At the time of the survey, the researcher held a senior administrative position at the institution used for this study, had been granted both undergraduate and graduate degrees from another university, and had been involved with higher education advancement for twenty-two years.

Data Analyses

Quantitative data analyses including frequency counts, descriptive analysis, and tests of statistical significance were all used in gauging motivation and engagement. The standard *p*-value used by most education researchers of .05 ($p = .05$) was employed (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Results and Discussion

In this study, several factors were examined in relation to alumni volunteering and/or donating. These were factors experienced in the student experience and the alumni relationship.

Arrival and Engagement

This study examined arrival time to college from high school as it related to alumni engagement. In this study, 72.5% of respondents first arrived at the college less than one year after completing high school. It was expected that those who arrived at college in this time frame would be more involved as students and therefore more likely

to engage as alumni (Hummel, 2001; Barber, 2010). A chi-square test of independence was conducted on alumni volunteering/donating and arrival to college. The analysis indicated that alumni who volunteer/donate did so independent of arrival time to the college, $\chi^2(2, N = 302) = .953, p = .621$, thereby not supporting prior research. This may imply that the college's efforts to involve students should focus on the traditional 18-20 year olds as well as the non-traditional, older students when it plans for student activities. Since neither group indicated different engagement rates as alumni, the college advancement office may also benefit more if it did not segment these groups when planning for alumni engagement activities. However, by focusing on programs and efforts aimed at retaining students once on campus, the institution is making an investment for future alumni engagement.

Residency and Engagement

Other studies have shown that peer interaction and on-campus involvement lead to more alumni engagement (Astin, 1999; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999). Of the participants in this study, 70.2% responded that they lived on campus. This may imply that these students would have more opportunity to become involved in student activities and therefore be more likely to become engaged alumni. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating for students who lived on and off campus. The individuals living on-campus reported higher levels of donating and/or volunteering ($M = 52.83\%$, $SD = .50$) than did the individuals living off-campus and donating and/or volunteering ($M = 37.78\%$, $SD = .49$), $t(300) = 2.44, p = .016$. There was a small effect size

(*Cohen's d*' = .30). The current study was consistent with previous works (Astin, 1999; Hernandez et al., 1999) and supported the hypothesis in this case, providing evidence that living on campus was related to alumni engagement. The institution's residence halls could be a good cultivation point for future alumni engagement as the on-campus residents would generally be more inclined to participate in student activities designed to build the student-institution bond and making them more cognizant of opportunities to engage throughout their lifetimes.

Extracurricular Involvement and Engagement

Prior studies have indicated that alumni who were involved as students would be engaged as graduates (Astin, 1999; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Almost three fourths (74.8%) of the participants in the current study report being involved in extracurricular activities. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering and/or donating for students involved in extracurricular activities and those not involved in extracurricular activities. Alumni who were involved in extracurricular student activities reported more volunteering and donating ($M = 53.10\%$, $SD = .50$) than those alumni who were not involved in extracurricular activities as students ($M = 34.21\%$, $SD = .48$), $t(300) = 2.95$, $p = .004$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .39). The findings were consistent with previous research (Astin, 1999; Weerts & Ronca, 2008) regarding student involvement and alumni engagement. Based on this evidence, the college should offer a variety of extracurricular activities for students and be careful to track student participants who are involved in clubs, organizations, Greek societies, etc. The rosters of these groups could then be used to

seek out former student participants to become volunteers and/or donors to the college.

The college could also provide engagement opportunities for alumni in areas reflective of student programs such as reunions for student clubs or fundraising efforts focused on support for extracurricular organizations.

Student Leadership and Engagement

According to research, student experiences such as leadership positions held play a key role in alumni engagement with the alma mater (Fitch, 1991; Pumerantz, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). In the current study, 35.8% of the respondents held these types of positions. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering and/or donating for reported student leadership positions. The percentage of former student leaders who donated and/or volunteered ($M = 62.96\%$, $SD = .49$) was higher than the percentage of students not holding leadership positions ($M = 40.21\%$, $SD = .49$), $t(300) = 3.87$, $p < .001$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d* = .48). This study supported previous studies (Fitch, 1991; Pumerantz, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2008) in that there was a relationship between students and alumni who volunteered and/or donated. This may imply that the college should maintain contact with former student leaders and seek to engage them as alumni. The college might offer opportunities for former student leaders to preside over certain alumni volunteer activities as well as challenge these leaders to head fundraising appeals aimed at the other students who were active under their leadership. As discussed above, data on student leaders should be maintained by the college and shared with the advancement office for attempts to reach out to possible alumni volunteers and donors.

Financial Support and Engagement

Although Meer and Rosen's (2012) work contributed to the notion that financial support for students does not contribute to alumni engagement, previous research indicated that students who received scholarships and other financial assistance tended to give back more often than those without such support (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). For the current study, an independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating and reported student scholarship recipients. The percentage of former student scholarship recipients who donated and/or volunteered ($M = 51.43\%$, $SD = .50$) was not significantly different than the percentage of students not receiving scholarships ($M = 46.70\%$, $SD = .50$), $t(300) = .781$, $p = .435$. An independent-samples *t* test was also conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating and reported student financial aid recipients. The percentage of former student financial aid recipients who donated and/or volunteered ($M = 45.45\%$, $SD = .50$) was not significantly different than the percentage of students not receiving scholarships ($M = 50.28\%$, $SD = .50$), $t(300) = .820$, $p = .413$. While 34.8% of the respondents reported receiving scholarships and 40.1% reported receiving financial aid, this study reflected the more recent findings by Meer and Rosen, as it found no significant relationship between the receiving of student scholarships and alumni engagement. The results of this study did not collaborate earlier findings that indicated those students receiving financial assistance were more inclined to engage (Weerts et al., 2007), but rather supported the more recent findings by Meer and Rosen (2012). This may imply that the college's traditional strategy to focus scholarship fundraising

activities on former scholarship recipients is invalid. Perhaps this is because scholarship recipient's efforts were minimal other than attaining good grades to receive a scholarship. That is, they did what they were supposed to do academically, but showed no other initiatives to be involved. The college should perhaps look at more relevant student involvement factors in which to focus its philanthropic efforts.

Recognition and Engagement

Astin (1999) and Maslow (1943) noted that recognition for academic achievement was related to engagement. Similar findings were expected for this study. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating for reported academic recognition as students. Students who were recognized for academic achievements donated and/or volunteered more ($M = 54.88\%$, $SD = .50$) than the percentage of students not receiving recognition ($M = 40.58\%$, $SD = .49$), $t(300) = 2.494$, $p = .013$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .50). Of the total respondents to this study, 54.3% received academic recognition. The hypothesis for this relationship was supported in this study and it also supported earlier studies based on recognition, achievement, and alumni engagement (Astin, 1999; Maslow, 1943). This may imply that these alumni were motivated to give back or engage because of their feelings of belonging generated by the institution's recognition of their efforts. Philanthropic and volunteer efforts by the college should be focused on those students who received academic recognition. It would be very important for the college to maintain contact with these individuals over time and to design fundraising and

volunteer efforts that coincided with as well as reflected the college's recognition efforts for students.

Administrative Functions and Engagement

In this study a majority of respondents indicated they were very satisfied as students with the college's administrative functions (66.2%). Based on numerous previous studies (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Pumerantz, 2005), this study was expected to reveal a strong relationship between alumni volunteering and/or donating and satisfaction with college administrative functions. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating and reported student satisfaction with administrative functions. Those alumni who volunteered and/or donated reported a higher level of student satisfaction with administrative functions ($M = 36.99$, $SD = .57$) than those who did not volunteer/donate ($M = 35.32$, $SD = .63$), $t(300) = 2.416$, $p = .016$. There was a small effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .28). Findings in this analysis coincided with earlier works in regards to satisfaction with college administrative functions and engagement. Activities such as the admissions process (Baade & Sundberg, 1996) and positive relationships between students and faculty and staff (Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Pumerantz, 2005) appeared to relate to alumni volunteering and/or donating. As this relationship implies, the college should be certain to provide the best possible service to students throughout their student experience. Examples of effective service include a seamless processing of applications for admission, accurate and timely advising of students, and proactive customer service attitudes. In addition, faculty and staff should create a positive and engaging atmosphere

for students both in the classroom and for extracurricular activities, helping to shape the students and arouse their affections for the institution as Dewey (1929) described. These efforts may provide attachment opportunities for the student to the institution and thereby pave the way for greater alumni engagement.

Student Satisfaction and Alumni Satisfaction

This study also examined satisfaction of alumni as related to various student experiences. Astin (1999), Grube and Piliavin (2000), and Weerts and Ronca (2008) reported that alumni who were satisfied with their overall student experiences would also be satisfied with their alumni relationship. This study examined satisfaction with student experiences in relation to satisfaction with the alumni relationship and predicted that respondents who were satisfied with one would be satisfied with the other. Of those participating, 64.4% indicated satisfaction with the alumni relationship, while 75.8% reported satisfaction with the student experience. A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni satisfaction and student satisfaction. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni satisfaction and student satisfaction, $r(300) = .338$, $p < .001$, indicating the findings of this study supported the prior research. In addition, prior research showed that satisfaction as an alumnus was positively related to satisfaction with college administrative functions (Beeler, 1982). In this study, 66.2% of respondents reported satisfaction with these administrative functions. A Pearson's correlation analysis was also conducted between alumni satisfaction and student satisfaction with administrative functions. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni satisfaction and student satisfaction with administrative functions,

$r(300) = .330, p < .001$. This study supports the earlier research (Beeler, 1982), indicating a positive relationship between student satisfaction with administrative functions and satisfaction with the alumni relationship. These two analyses indicated that alumni who were satisfied with their overall student experience, including the college's administrative functions, were also satisfied with their alumni relationship. These findings may imply that the college needs to provide strong student support and a positive atmosphere throughout the student lifecycle. This may also provide rationale for the college to conduct graduation surveys to learn which students indicate satisfaction with the student experience and the college's administrative functions. These questionnaires could be repeated on a regular basis with alumni to gather data over time and to determine if satisfaction levels concerning these experiences have changed based on life issues and/or time removed from the institution. The college could then approach those indicating positive student experiences for funds and/or volunteer assignments.

Awareness and Motivation

The current study also examined the awareness of key constituent groups (alumni, volunteers, and donors) by students as it related to alumni motivation for engagement. Dewey (1929) noted the significance of the "union of individuals" (p. 35) and Astin (1999) found the student experience greatly impacts the alumni relationship. It was anticipated that motivated alumni were also students who recognized interaction with the college by these three groups. In the study 46.7% were aware of alumni involvement while they were students, 30.7% were aware of volunteer efforts, and 49.5% were aware of donor interaction. Independent-samples t test were conducted on each of these

categories to determine the differences in alumni motivation to volunteer/donate and group awareness by students. Those alumni who reported motivation ($M = 21.70$, $SD = 1.81$) reported a higher level of alumni awareness than those without motivation ($M = 16.27$, $SD = 1.80$), $t(300) = 2.613$, $p = .009$. There was a small effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .30) for this analysis. Those alumni who reported motivation ($M = 24.24$, $SD = 1.90$) reported a higher level of volunteer awareness than those without motivation ($M = 16.41$, $SD = 1.74$), $t(300) = 3.498$, $p = .001$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .43) for this analysis. Finally, those alumni who reported motivation ($M = 23.02$, $SD = 1.87$) reported a higher level of donor awareness than those without motivation ($M = 14.67$, $SD = 1.68$), $t(300) = 4.073$, $p < .001$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .47) for this analysis. All three independent-samples *t* tests supported the hypothesis and the previous research of Dewey and Astin. Implications for the college in regards to awareness would suggest that the college expose students to alumni volunteers and donors. This could be done through alumni-student social gatherings, scholarship recognition events, honors and awards ceremonies, and dedications for major gifts from benefactors. In addition, alumni could be highlighted for special accomplishments on the college Web page, in the student newspaper, and at graduation. This would help the students recognize the value of alumni and donors and it would provide a positive example for which the students could model their careers. All of these have positive associations for students with the institution and would reinforce Maslow's (1943) theory of belongingness and association, in turn endearing the student to the institution and providing a positive relationship for future alumni engagement.

Motivation and Satisfaction

Maslow (1943) and Hummel (2001) found that alumni motivation was related to a higher level of satisfaction with the student experience. This relationship was expected in this study as well. The majority of respondents indicated they were very satisfied with their student experience (75.8%) A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni motivation and level of satisfaction with the student experience. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni motivation and level of satisfaction with the student experience, $r(300) = .257, p < .001$, indicating that this study reflected other work in this area and it supported the prediction for this category. As with satisfaction, the motivation findings may imply that the institution focus on providing an appealing student experience based on opportunities for student involvement, user-friendly administrative operations, and a participatory faculty who are willing to work with the students and help them as appropriate through the student years.

Conclusion

In summary, the current study found that alumni engagement is related to the student experience itself, especially when the students are satisfied with important student life functions. Several of these factors (extracurricular involvement, student leadership, and recognition) were measured to determine their relationships with alumni volunteering and/or donating. The findings of this study supported the prior research of Pumerantz (2005), Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, and Lovell (1999), and Astin (1999) as these researchers had indicated a relationship with these functions and alumni engagement. Based on the results of the current study and earlier studies, it is recommended that the

college continue to involve students in college-sanctioned activities and organizations as often as possible. Living on-campus provides for many positive connecting points for student involvement so it would be beneficial for the college to encourage students to live in its residence facilities and take part in extracurricular activities sponsored in the dormitories. The institution would benefit by incorporating student activities into its strategic plan as well as keeping accurate records of students who are involved with organizations and campus life, especially those who served as student leaders. This data could prove valuable later as the institution solicits these former students to donate to the alma mater or to head alumni volunteer efforts.

Findings of this study also indicated that alumni engagement is related to the college administrative processes. This supported Beeler's (1982) work and may imply to the institution that it should be mindful of its typical functions such as admissions, advisement, and counseling. By being sensitive to the needs of students in these areas and by providing efficient and effective operations which serve to execute the required procedures, the college would establish a positive rapport with students and be more prone to have them engage during the alumni years.

Astin (1999) noted the importance of recognizing academic achievement as it relates to alumni engagement. The current study found this to be true of its participants, indicating that the college should provide a consistent and public emphasis on academic accomplishments. This could lead feelings of connectivity with the institution and later to avenues of engagement for graduates. As academic achievement is by definition the

college's primary mission, the identification of exceptional students would only enhance the institution's purpose and reemphasize the value of outstanding academic efforts.

In this study, neither student scholarship recipients nor student financial aid recipients reported different levels of alumni engagement than non-aid recipients. This contradicted research by Weerts and Ronca (2007), but supported research by Meer and Rosen (2012). Since no relationship with alumni engagement was found for either group in the current study, this may imply that the institution would not need to track alumni engagement as closely as some of the other student experience factors. However, as Dewey (1943) and Astin (1999) pointed out and the current study supported, certain recognitions did relate to alumni engagement. Because both the college's recognition of academic achievement by students (as noted above) as well as the students' recognition of alumni donors was linked to alumni engagement, this might imply that the institution should make efforts to connect student scholarship recipients with scholarship donors as often as possible. This might be done during special recognition ceremonies such as scholarship awards receptions in which both the students and donors participated, publications and/or Web-based acknowledgement pieces for both recipients and donors, and personalized notes to donors by scholarship recipients. These recognition efforts support Maslow's (1943) ideal of belongingness and self-actualization, thereby providing the former students a reason to stay connected with the institution.

The current study found a positive relationship between satisfaction for the overall student experience and satisfaction with the alumni relationship. This indicates that the institution should be highly cognizant of providing positive campus life

experiences that offer a respectful approach to administrative functions, multitudes of interaction opportunities for students, and on-going occasions for alumni to volunteer and/or donate to the alma mater. These recommendations may hold true for the majority of collegiate institutions.

Future research conducted in this area might be more focused on specific student involvement variables in an effort to determine what has been most influential over time to alumni engagement. This would help the college administration determine strategies for future student programming and where to place emphasis to engage students.

Another area of possible future study might entail the tracking of student involvement to include a listing of all student participants in all clubs and organizations every year. This record keeping would benefit the college as advancement personnel would know who participated in what (student organizations) as well as who received merit for what (academic recognition), allowing for more intimate associations for both volunteer and donation opportunities with alumni. This information could be used by the advancement office to segment alumni programs and philanthropic appeals, anticipating that those involved students would have an affinity to engage in like-focused efforts as alumni.

Perhaps another area of future research might focus on how the college's administrative process can be continually fine-tuned to offer expedient and student-first assistance with those functions experienced by most students. As the current study found, the administrative process is very important to student satisfaction and therefore to alumni engagement.

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Running head: MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Motivation Factors Related to Alumni Volunteering and Donating

Abstract

Political science, sociology, and social psychology offer extensive theories as to why persons are motivated. Volunteering and philanthropic engagement with non-profits, including institution of higher education, result from a variety of influences such as altruism, awareness, and efficacy. In addition, theories based on human development, social behavior, and expectancy also provide applicable contexts for study. This study examined motivation factors of alumni from a small, rural state college and how these factors impacted alumni volunteerism and philanthropy. It also incorporated validated motivational theories to better understand the *why*, *what*, and *when* of alumni engagement. Findings of the study revealed that inclination to give back, either with time or money, by graduates is highly influenced by the alumnus' affinity for his alma mater, his experiences as a student, and his connectivity to the institution as a graduate. This study also found that the frequency of staying in contact with alumni as well as the variety of connecting points initiated by the institution impacts motivation by alumni. Sharing information regarding institutional priorities, objectives, and needs was found to be paramount to motivating graduates to engage with the college. In addition, the study pointed out that showcasing how alumni can and do impact current students also enhanced alumni volunteerism and philanthropy.

Motivation Factors Related to Alumni Volunteering and Donating

Political science, sociology, and social psychology offer extensive research into factors that relate to a person's involvement with non-profits, including engagement by graduates with their higher education alma maters. Alumni of state colleges often refer to their alma maters with passion and conviction, using terms such as "family," "opportunity," "dedicated professors," and "work ethic" (Barber, 2010). This connectivity is best associated with the belongingness and love needs level of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, connecting the alumnus with the organization on a deep, personal level. In addition, researchers such as Berkowitz (1968), Diamond and Kashyap (1997), and Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) noted the link between alumni perceptions about gift impact and institutional need. These characteristics of affection and motivation provide a framework for lifelong engagement by the alumnus with the institution. This engagement leads to support from graduates in critical fields such as new student recruitment, mentorship and job placement, political relations, and fundraising. As small, rural state institutions seek to thrive in a new era of the state college where competition for students, funds, and political favor are key, they can take advantage of alumni devotion and loyalty to enhance lifelong connections to the alma mater.

Alumni Engagement: Philanthropy

Over the past three decades, much scholarly research has been conducted on alumni engagement. Of that research, alumni philanthropy has been the most prominently investigated topic because of institutions' needs for private support (Burke, 1988; Carboni & Proper, 2008). Many studies have examined specific variables that influence alumni donations, including: family income, numbers and ages of dependents,

social connections, and student debt (Olsen, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Other studies have investigated the impact of the collegiate experience on alumni donors (Clotfelter, 2003; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Thomas & Smart, 2005). Additional research has focused on graduates' attitudes about institutional needs (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007; Berkowitz, 1968; Diamond & Kashyap, 1997; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), while other studies have examined the impacts of gifts on the institution (Center on Philanthropy, 2009; Weerts & Ronca, 2009).

Rural state colleges were included in the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) fiscal year 2010 report regarding education finance. This report announced that in 2010, 40.3% of higher education funding was comprised of tuition dollars. It also reported that state and local support for full-time-equivalent (FTE) students was at a 25-year low. In addition to the decline of public funding and the increasing reliance on tuition dollars, the same report noted that on a national scale, collegiate enrollment increased 6% between 2009 and 2010 and 35% between 2000 and 2010. According to Board of Regents, University System of Georgia (USG) Semester Enrollment Reports (2008, 2009, 2010), similar increases in numbers of students and similar decreases in per FTE support occurred at institutions classified as state colleges in the USG. Since state colleges rely heavily on student tuition for budget purposes, this equated to a significant loss of revenue at these institutions.

Alumni giving is particularly important to the state college that depends heavily on public funding and tuition dollars. Administrators rely on alumni donations and need to understand key predictors of alumni capacity and inclination for giving (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) assessed over 500 studies on the

characteristics of giving, including motivations for giving. Weerts and Ronca (2009) collapsed these findings into four groups: “awareness of need and efficacy; solicitation; costs and benefits; and altruism and ‘impure’ altruism” (p. 96). Comprehending these classifications can assist institutions as they seek donors to help off-set declining budgets.

Prospective donors must be aware of the needs of the organization (Berkowitz, 1968; Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964; Schwartz, 1975). Weerts and Ronca (2009) cited several alumni-specific studies which use the variable “perceived need for financial support” (efficacy) as an important indicator of giving (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997; House, 1987; Miracle, 1977; Taylor & Martin, 1995). It is also important that donors recognize that their giving makes a difference. According to Weerts and Ronca (2009), cognizance and efficiency are best comprehended through expectancy theory. This theory proposes that individuals give based on if they feel the institution needs their assistance and the extent to which their support will impact the college.

Most donations occur because the donor was solicited (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007), with one study finding that 85% of gifts occurred as the result of a solicitation (Bryant, Slaughter, Kang, & Tax, 2003). Several researchers have acknowledged that increased giving by graduates is positively correlated with expenditures on advancement programs (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Harrison, 1995; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Okunade, 1996;). Successful solicitation strategies are likely to be positively influenced because of the raised awareness of needs and assurance that alumni giving makes a difference at the institution (Weerts and Ronca, 2009).

Costs and benefits of alumni giving refer to the amount of resources needed by a donor to make a gift. Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) cited multiple studies which reveal

that when costs are minimized, giving is enhanced (Bekkers, 2005; Eckel & Grossman, 2003; Karlan & List, 2006). This construct leads to tax policy impacts on charitable giving (Feldstein, 1975; Feldstein & Taylor, 1976; Hood, Martin, & Osberg, 1977; Kitchin & Dalton, 1990). That is, donors are eligible for certain tax deductions based on gifts to non-profits. Costs and benefits may also reflect competition from other non-profit organizations. Alumni donors may support new non-profits or increase their support for charities other than the school and thereby reduce their giving to the alma mater (Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Contrary to this theory, House (1987) and Miracle (1977) proposed that those who give to their alma maters are often more gift-inclined and therefore will give to multiple non-profits. Weerts and Ronca (2009) noted another cost and benefits aspect derived from giving levels related to the quality of the donor's collegiate experience: higher levels of donations correspond with exceptional academic and social involvements experienced by the alumnus. This is often related to the amount of funds the institution spent on the alumnus as a student (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson, 1995) as the alumnus views giving as a repayment for his education (Leslie & Ramey, 1988). In addition, mentoring in college (Clotfelter, 2003) and regular interaction with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003) are associated with alumni donations. Furthermore, giving by graduates has been reported as having a positive correlation with better grades (Marr, Mullen, & Siegfried, 2005). Alumni philanthropy is also linked to social experiences in college such as student extracurricular involvement (Dugan, Mullin, & Siegfried 2000; Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson 1995; Monks 2003).

Keating, Pitts, and Appel (as cited in Weerts & Ronca, 2009) suggested philanthropists donated to non-profits because of their intent to provide goods and services to society, that is, altruism. 'Impure' altruism refers to donors who are driven to give by individual intangible values (Andreoni, 1989). Such intangible incentives include enhanced self-esteem or group connections (Keating et al. as cited in Weerts & Ronca, 2009), enhanced reputation, reverence, alliances, and other positive social and psychological advantages (Olson, 1965). With regard to alumni giving, Maude (1997) suggested that the institutional affiliation may increase alumni self-esteem or personal rewards due to a renewed affiliation with their institution. Such intangible benefits have been shown by Yoo and Harrison (1989) to directly correlate with alumni gifts. Weerts and Ronca (2009) further noted that alumni emotional attachments to the institution are important predictors of alumni-giving, and if the rewards are positive, giving is elevated. As another indicator, Weerts and Ronca (2009) referred to studies by Okunade and Berl (1997) and Wunnava and Lauze (2001) when they suggested that family tradition positively impacts giving of funds, time, and emotional investments in an institution and that these are connected with alumni philanthropy. In addition, Korvas (as cited in Lawley, 2008) noted that alumni who have extended and intimate connections with their institution are more likely to give to their alumni institution.

Engaging alumni, causing them to reflect on their collegiate experiences and helping them to better understand their alma mater's needs and situations, enhances the inclination of graduates to financially support their alma mater (Pumerantz, 2005). Rural state colleges can take advantage of this information to increase budgets.

Alumni Engagement: Theories

Motivation to engage is paramount to alumni involvement. Kotler and Armstrong (1993) stated that a motivated individual is poised to do something and noted that how the person behaves is prompted by his assessment of the situation. Several motivational theories tend to encourage alumni to act, or engage, with the alma mater.

All motivated behavior is to be recognized as a method by which fundamental requirements may be concurrently conveyed or fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's five-stage Hierarchy of Needs model described how people are driven by certain needs at certain times. His stages were: biological and physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. His theory suggested that one need generally is precipitated on the gratification of another more influential need. Hummel (2001) suggested that alumni engagement occurs at the belongingness and love needs level, which is characterized by a feeling of belonging, inclusion in a group, and other communal associations. This theory explains the *why* of alumni engagement.

Also applicable to alumni engagement is Erikson's Theory of Human Development (as cited in Huyck & Hoyer, 1982). Erikson expressed human development relative to eight stages, each representing an essential challenge to the ego that the individual must confront and resolve. Hummel (2001) suggested that the seventh ego challenge – generativity versus stagnation – is relevant to alumni involvement, particularly to alumni giving. This stage generally occurs in middle adulthood (age 40-65) and happens because of a concern for, and inclination to, assist the next generation. In regards to alumni engagement, Hummel asserted that institutions should

build ties with middle-aged alumni, including connecting them directly and indirectly with current students. According to Huyck and Hoyer, and subsequently reinforced by Hummel, Erikson's theory forecasts the *when* of alumni engagement.

Bickhard (2006) offered a concept on developmental normativity and normative development. He asserted that motivation is often what leads to action versus inaction. He contended that people are inherently interacting in order to survive, so the question is not whether something will be done, but rather what will be done next. In relation to alumni engagement, Bickhard's work emphasised to institutions that they need to create engagement opportunities so alumni will receive a clear understanding of institutional needs and expectations. Bickhard's work emphasized the significance of the *what* of alumni engagement.

Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested three conceptual models relevant to inclination of alumni support: social exchange theory, expectancy theory, and the investment model. Social exchange theory implies that affiliations are reciprocal and often consist of unequal partnerships. This theory asserts that associations are considered in terms of economics, and credit and debts are assessed to determine if the affiliation will continue (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). The theory is applied to alumni involvement by weighing the costs of volunteering against past or present benefits received from the institution (Weerts et al., 2007). The costs are measured in time, professional skills, and/or connections, while the benefits are measured in educational quality, institutional reputation and prestige, and individual social connections and/or career enhancement. Those alumni who donate will decide their engagement level as calculated on this analysis of exchange. Additionally, alumni support is anticipated by the individual's current or

past perceptions of his value of the institution, including whether or not the graduate received financial aid as a student (Weerts et al., 2007). Dugan et al. (2000) found that alumni who received academic scholarships as students were inclined to increase gift size compared to those receiving no scholarships. Similarly, Monks (2003) found those who received financial aid as students gave more than those with loan debt. Based on these studies, Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested alumni donors may be more inclined to provide volunteer time if they received financial help as students. In contrast, a report derived from a 15-year analysis of a private institution concluded that students who take out loans are less likely to donate (Meer & Rosen, 2012). Additionally, these researchers found that students who received scholarships tended to donate less than peers who did not receive aid.

Expectancy theory is an expression of why individuals chose one behavior over others (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). In so doing, it explains how the individual makes decisions to achieve end results. The expectancy is the principle that a person's endeavors will cause anticipated goals to be met. This thought process is usually grounded in the person's past experiences, self-assurances (self-efficacy), and the identified goal (Scholl, 2011). As applied to alumni engagement, this theory suggests that alumni construct expectancies about upcoming events and adapt their behavior around these events (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Alumni weigh institutional involvement based on whether or not they can make a difference to the institution and thereby achieve success in their role as institution volunteers. Applying Vroom's classic 1964 work to alumni motivation, Weerts and Ronca (2007) contended that alumni engagement centered on three dynamics:

(1) Valence: the value of the perceived outcome or the personal stakes of volunteering. (2) Instrumentality: the belief that volunteering will help the university achieve a certain outcome. (3) Expectancy: that the alumni donor [defined by philanthropy and volunteerism] feels capable of successfully completing the volunteer actions. (p. 278)

Weerts and Ronca (2007) surmised that institutions influence alumni expectations and alumni establish volunteer decisions from these expectations. As an example, Harrison (1995) claimed that institutions disburse a considerable amount of time and money to shape alumni expectations in order to persuade graduates to give and/or volunteer. Applied to alumni engagement, expectancy theory suggests that alumni considerations are influenced by the institution and that the alumni will weigh these considerations in their decisions to be involved or not with the school (Weerts et al., 2007).

The investment model contends that one's dedication to a relationship fluctuates on how content he is about the costs and rewards of that relationship and what he sees as a fair balance in it; a comparison with potential alternate relationships; and how much the person has already put into the relationship (Changing Minds.Org, 2011). Weerts and Ronca (2007) applied the model to alumni engagement. They contended that it predicts alumni involvement based on the satisfaction level of the alumnus regarding the amount of time, emotion, and energy that he devoted to institution. This is significant to alumni engagement as studies have shown that emotional attachment is a predictor of alumni connection (Beeler, 1982). Referencing the work of Okunade and Berl (1997) and Wunnava and Lauze (2001), Weerts and Ronca (2008) further suggested that families

with multiple generations of attendees of the institution are associated with alumni support due to their continued affiliation with the institution.

Astin's (1999) Student Involvement Theory proposed many influences on college students such as better grades for involved students and more social integration for students active with college functions. This theory centering on student-based issues is substantiated by other investigators (see Abrahamowicz as cited by Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Astin, 1999; Barber, 2010; Feldman & Newcomb, 1994; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999; Miller & Jones as cited in Fitch, 1991; Pumerantz, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). These theories help explain the *how* of alumni philanthropy.

Several theories and conceptual models can be applied to alumni engagement for state colleges. Decreased state budgets, more expensive programs, and increasing operational costs lead to a greater dependency by institutions on private philanthropy. Perhaps the most influential and certainly the largest contingency of prospective supporters are the college's graduates. Understanding the *why, when, what, and how* of alumni giving is exceptionally important. Application of these theories into a college's framework is crucial in today's climate. The purpose of this study is to examine motivational influences which are related to alumni satisfaction and engagement in order to assist institutions throughout the life of the alumnus.

Methods

Procedures

Quantitative methods were used for the current study to answer the research question: *What motivational factors relate to alumni engagement?* Two assumptions were made: 1) general factors relate to an individual's engagement as an alumnus (Olsen,

Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009) and 2) alumni engagement is related throughout the alumni experience (Pumerantz, 2005).

Others have researched this topic using similar studies. Although this study's theoretical basis of content was modeled after a study reported by Hummel (2001), the gathering of data and methods of analysis was distinctly different from her effort. Primarily, the institution in this study was different than the institution Hummel studied and thereby the students and alumni were different. In addition, this study focused on a 104-year-old state college in rural, south Georgia, United States while Hummel's original study examined a 43-year-old Canadian university in a large, metropolitan city. To more accurately reflect the institution under study, questions within the instrument itself also differed from Hummel's study.

A 30-question survey was used to collect data for this study. General factors, factors related to alumni motivation for engagement, and factors related to alumni satisfaction were addressed using yes/no responses, check lists, and Likert scales. Some questions included the option of "other" to allow respondents to provide additional information. The final question was optional and qualitative in nature. Based on research indicating quicker response times and better data conversion rates (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004), the survey was delivered electronically by e-mail and simultaneously made available on the college's Facebook page. This provided the greatest opportunity for contact with the target population (Pew Research Center, 2012). A pre-determined date was selected to begin the study in order to achieve maximum response (Hamilton, 2011; PeoplePulse, 2011). A reminder e-mail to the same

population with the same Web site link was administered five days prior to the close of the survey. The survey was available for an 11-day period.

Variables

There were four categories of variables. The demographic variables addressed gender, age, race, date of entry, degree(s), and student residence. Student experience variables addressed issues experienced by most students at the college including functions associated with admissions and advising, student groups, and leadership of student organizations. Student experience variables focused on student scholarship and financial aid, academic recognition, awareness of assistance provided by non-students, and the overall student experience. Alumni engagement and satisfaction variables were focused on opportunities for alumni to be connected to and demonstrate support for the alma mater as identified through participation in alumni functions, philanthropy, and communication with the institution. Alumni motivation variables addressed attributes which cause alumni to volunteer and/or donate to the college such as reputation of the institution, gratitude, and desire to support students.

Participants

This study was conducted at a rural-based state college with approximately 42,000 alumni. A convenience sample of 6,500 possible respondents was selected because they each had valid e-mail addresses in the alumni database at the time of the study. An introductory letter which accompanied the survey expressed respondent anonymity and indicated approval of the research by the college.

There were 302 (5%) respondents participated in the study. Participants were predominantly Caucasian (94.0%) and the majority male (57.9%). Most (72.5%) first

arrived at the college less than one year after completing high school, with 66.6% enrolled in the college for two years. A majority (70.2%) lived in on-campus housing during their student years. The most popular degree among respondents was agriculture (29.8%) and 75.8% of the respondents completed the Associates degree at the college in one of its offered disciplines. A majority of the respondents (63.2%) eventually received a Bachelor's degree at another institution.

This research protocol was exempt from Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category 2.

Limitations

The sample for this study was limited to the alumni for whom the college had valid e-mail addresses. Graduates for whom there was no e-mail address were equally important to the institution and may have been engaged with the college. This group was not included in the study, but would have provided equally important data for this research.

The study was also limited by using retrospective data, having participants recall and interpret past events. This type of data collection risked distortion of the results due to the time elapsed since the respondents were students or had been involved with the college as alumni. Attitudes might have changed over time and emotional needs may have influenced people to alter their past to justify decisions or behaviors. For some respondents, a survey item or situational instance such as an economic reversal might have prompted an altered response. Both negative and positive experiences might have been interpreted in a distorted manner as the respondents recalled them from their pasts.

Alumni donor status was determined by whether or not the participant had contributed to the college or college's foundation. No information was requested regarding the size of the financial contribution, therefore dollar value variables were not present. These could have provided critical information for the college since this information could be used to measure financial impacts and future uses of funds.

Researcher bias is present in this study. At the time of the survey, the researcher held a senior administrative position at the institution under study, had been granted both the undergraduate and graduate degrees from another institution, and had been involved with higher education advancement for twenty-two years

Data Analysis

This study was conducted using quantitative data analyses, including frequency counts, descriptive analysis, and tests of statistical significance to gauge alumni motivation and engagement. The standard p -value used by most education researchers of .05 ($p = .05$) was employed for this study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

Results and Discussion

In this study, motivation factors were examined in relation to alumni volunteering and/or donating.

Employment and Engagement

Past research has indicated that general factors such as historical family influences, status of dependents, family income, and social connections influence philanthropy (Olsen, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Similarly, employment was predicted to be related to engagement. In the current study, 71.5% of respondents indicated that they were currently employed. Since it requires income to

donate and to volunteer, it was expected that respondents who were volunteers and/or donors would also be more likely to be employed and thereby have more income to donate and/or volunteer. An independent-samples t test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni employment status and reported alumni volunteer and/or donor status. The percentage of alumni who were employed full-time reported no significant difference in volunteering and/or donating as graduates ($M = 46.8\%$, $SD = .50$) than those alumni who were not employed full-time ($M = 52.33\%$, $SD = .50$), $t(300) = .872$, $p = .384$. The findings in this study were not supportive of prior research indicating that current employment was related to engagement opportunities for alumni. This may imply that there is no need for the college to use employment status as an indicator of alumni engagement. Instead, perhaps the college should focus on other factors which were proven to be related to volunteering and/or donating.

Business Affiliations and Engagement

Based on the same past research (Olsen, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), having a business relationship with another graduate was expected to lead to more alumni engagement because of the strong social association with fellow alumni. An independent-samples t test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating for reported alumni business relationships. The percentage of alumni who reported having business relationships with other alumni and who also volunteered and/or donated ($M = 53.16\%$, $SD = .50$) was not significantly different than the percentage of alumni who had business relationships but who did not volunteer and/or donate ($M = 43.06\%$, $SD = .50$), $t(300) = 1.759$, $p = .080$. Although more than half (52.3%) of the respondents reported having a business relationship with a fellow

graduate, this type of social connection did not support earlier work that connected to business relationships with alumni volunteering and/or donating. Again, this may imply that the college needs to focus on other criteria besides alumni-to-alumni business relationships. However, the institution may wish to publicize these unique relationships among its graduates as this could prove to be a motivational link to the institution for alumni. Those alumni with business ties as well as other graduates might view this positively and therefore be inclined to engage.

Contact and Engagement

Awareness of institutional needs (Berkowitz, 1968; Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964; Schwartz, 1975), extended and intimate connections with the institution (Lawley, 2008), as well as regular interaction with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003) have been reported as important for alumni engagement. The majority of alumni in this study reported maintaining contact with the institution (83.8%), mostly by way of face-to-face interaction with other graduates or faculty and staff (53.6%). This was interpreted as valuable for respondents; therefore, it was assumed that alumni who volunteered and/or donated would also stay connected with the college more frequently than those who did not volunteer and/or donate. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences between alumni who stayed connected with the college and reported that they were volunteers and/or donors and those alumni who did not report connections. Those alumni who volunteered/donated also had more alumni contact points ($M = 22.61$, $SD = 1.34$) than those alumni who did not volunteer/donate ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 1.085$), $t(300) = 6.69$, $p < .001$. There was a large effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .78). This study supported the hypothesis and the prior research (Berkowitz, 1968; Berkowitz & Daniels,

1964; Schwartz, 1975; Lawley, 2008; Monks, 2003) providing a compelling rationale for the institution to remain connected to its graduates. The institution would be advised to continually make its alumni aware of its needs and could do so in several ways. An alumni publication could cite the decline in state support (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2010) and link this to the college's financial needs. Administrators and advancement staff could continually convey the needs of the institution to the public while faculty could also explain the situation to current and former students with whom they are engaged.

Career Preparation and Engagement

Prior research by Chadwick-Jones (1976) indicated that constituents would stay connected based on the social exchange theory, with career preparation being a key factor in the debits/credits equation. Therefore it was expected that alumni in this study who credited the college as preparing them for their careers would have positive associations with the institution and engage as volunteers and/or donors. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating for reported career preparation. Those alumni who volunteered and/or donated reported better preparation for careers ($M = 35.2$, $SD = .57$) than those who did not volunteer and donate ($M = 33.46\%$, $SD = .66$), $t(300) = 2.472$, $p = .014$. There was a small effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .28). The findings of this study supported the earlier research (Chadwick-Jones, 1976) and should provide the institution the impetus needed to prepare students for careers as well as to help them find jobs. This finding could be a reminder for faculty and staff who interact with students that they are important in the process of a student's entire professional livelihood. Additionally, faculty could use their own industry contacts

to open doors for students to be exposed to practitioners in the field. These findings might also provide evidence that the institution structure select degree requirements to include internships and/or cooperative experiences for students so they gain even more career preparation opportunities. The college advancement office might use these findings to develop a job bank to post positions available within companies. Both students and alumni could take advantage of this service, providing another resource to students and another attachment point for alumni who might be looking for jobs or employers posting available positions. These opportunities would provide pathways for being engaged as well as cultivate affinity for the institution which is positively related to alumni engagement (Hummel, 2001).

Reputation and Engagement

Andreoni (1989) reported that individuals are compelled to engage based on personal intangible values while Olsen (1965) noted that alliances and other positive social and psychological advantages such as the college's reputation (Weerts & Ronca, 2007) promoted engagement. For this study, it was anticipated that alumni who volunteered and/or donated were expected to rate the college as having a better reputation than those who were not engaged. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in alumni volunteering/donating based on the reported college reputation. Those alumni who volunteered and/or donated reported that the college had a better reputation ($M = 45.62$, $SD = .66$) than those who did not volunteer/donate ($M = 42.95$, $SD = .74$), $t(300) = 3.294$, $p = .001$. There was a medium effect size (*Cohen's d*' = .70). In addition, 99% of the respondents to this study reported that the college had an average (9.3%), above-average (35.8%), or an excellent (54%) reputation.

This study supported the prior works of both Andreoni (1989) and Olson (1965) and provided the framework for the college to continue its efforts to retain its positive reputation as a state college. This solid reputation might be accomplished by maintaining an above-average standard for admission amongst peer institutions, providing students with both theory and practical knowledge, and by continually seeking a diverse student body to enhance student life, all of which leads to alumni engagement (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999). These efforts might then be reported through the media in key geographic student recruitment areas through featured stories and articles as well as publicized to the alumni through college periodicals and its Web site, all establishing and reinforcing compassion and responsiveness for the college.

Business Affiliations and Satisfaction

This study also examined satisfaction as related to alumni engagement. Based on previous studies, it was expected that this study would also reveal that maintaining connections with fellow graduates (Olsen, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), possessing an awareness of institutional needs (Berkowitz, 1968; Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964; Schwartz, 1975), extended and intimate connections with the institution (Lawley, 2008), and regular interaction with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003) would serve as motivating factors for satisfaction. Therefore, an independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in overall alumni satisfaction for reported business relationships with other alumni. Those alumni who reported business relationships ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .61$) reported satisfaction no differently than those without business relationships ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .58$), $t(300) = .796$, $p = .426$. Although this study

revealed that more than 52% of respondents indicated business relationships with other alumni, they did not indicate more satisfaction with the overall alumni relationship.

Contact and Satisfaction

Another independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine the differences in overall alumni satisfaction with former students who remained in contact with the institution. Those alumni who reported contact ($M = 30.85$, $SD = .63$) reported satisfaction no differently than those without contact ($M = 30.21$, $SD = .68$), $t(300) = .552$, $p = .582$. Although earlier research (Berkowitz, 1968; Berkowitz & Daniels, 1964; Schwartz, 1975; Lawley, 2008; Monks, 2003) had indicated that these were factors were related to alumni engagement, as also predicted for this study, the actual findings did not support prior research or the hypothesis for these relationships. These two findings might imply to the college that it should be consistent in providing connecting points for alumni, but that it should understand these are simply data gathering vehicles. Perhaps the important aspect of the connecting points are not the points themselves, but rather the information gleaned from them, indicating that the information shared should be relevant, current, and linked to the institution's mission of educating students. In other words, alumni publications and gatherings in and of themselves are not as important as well-planned efforts which convey the meaning and purpose of the institution.

Student Experience Satisfaction and Alumni Satisfaction

Based on Astin's (1999) work, it was predicted that a positive relationship would exist between positive alumni satisfaction with the alumni relationship and positive student satisfaction with the overall student experience. A Pearson's correlation analysis

was conducted between these two variables. There was a significant positive relationship between positive satisfaction with the overall student experience and positive satisfaction with the alumni relationship, $r(300) = .246, p < .001$. This analysis supported the hypothesis and Astin's (1999) prior research. These findings could indicate that the college should include a strong student affairs component within its strategic plan. To define this outside-the-classroom element, the college could make sure it employs student life professionals who can implement appropriate involvement opportunities for students as well as find ways to enhance student participation. The alumni, on the other hand, should be more informed about these priorities by way of publications, student/alumni interaction events, and highlighted articles about particular student events and interactions, all of which would lead to enhanced nostalgia affinity for the institution.

Reputation and Satisfaction

Olsen (1965) reported evidence that alliances and other positive social and psychological advantages induced engagement, Andreoni (1989) noted that individuals are compelled to engage based on personal intangible values, and Weerts and Ronca (2007) reported that the college's reputation played a key role in alumni engagement. Based on these works, alumni satisfaction and college reputation were anticipated to be connected in this study. A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni satisfaction and college reputation. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni satisfaction and college reputation, $r(300) = .436, p < .001$, thereby supporting the hypothesis and prior work (Olsen, 1965; Andreoni, 1989; Weerts et al., 2007). As indicated above, the college might continually seek ways to uphold the standards associated with its mission as a teaching institution that incorporates hands-on learning

for students. This could be frequently reiterated to the alumni through its various connecting venues.

Career Preparation and Satisfaction

For this study it was predicted that alumni satisfaction, and those alumni who felt the college prepared them for their careers, would have a positive connection. This prediction was based on work by Chadwick-Jones (1976) who noted that career preparation is positively related to alumni engagement (assuming engagement was predicated by satisfaction). A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni satisfaction and career preparation and proved this correlation to be true. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni satisfaction and career preparation, $r(300) = .417, p < .001$. This study supported prior work by Chadwick-Jones (1976) and supported the hypothesis regarding a relationship between career preparation and alumni satisfaction. Like the relationship between career preparation and engagement, the relationship between career preparation and satisfaction includes providing students a variety of academic disciplines with hands-on applications. The college might seek to incorporate this type of work into its academic curricula so that the students better understand the career field.

Reputation and Motivation

This study also examined factors related to motivation by alumni to volunteer and/or donate. Research by Andreoni (1989) and Olsen (1965) reported that individuals are compelled to engage based on personal intangible values and alliances and other positive social and psychological advantages. Based on this prior research, it was predicted that this study would have similar findings for engagement and motivation. It

was expected that alumni who are motivated to volunteer and/or donate would also rate the college's reputation higher than those who were not motivated to engage. A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni motivation and college reputation. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni motivation and college reputation, $r(300) = .266, p < .001$. This study supported the prior research (Andreoni, 1989; Olsen, 1965) for a positive relationship between motivation and engagement. This might imply to the college that it should report its escalating reputation to its graduates. The college might also seek out comparison statistics in the areas of graduate hire rates, salaries, and job placement and share these data with both student recruits and alumni. Doing so would further raise awareness of college efforts as well as the reputation of the college, thereby increasing the alumni's inclination to volunteer and/or donate.

Career Preparation and Motivation

It was presumed that alumni who reported greater levels of motivation would also report greater career preparation by the college. This prediction was based on a report by Weerts and Ronca (2009) noting the emotional attachment of graduates who indicated positive associations with the institution. A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni motivation and career preparation. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni motivation and career preparation, $r(300) = .296, p < .001$, supporting the prediction and work by Weerts et al. (2009). These findings might imply that alumni should be more aware of how the college is currently preparing students for careers. In addition, perhaps the college should provide a review of how the institution has maintained career preparation as a standard throughout its history. This

could lead to a sentimental link to the college by alumni (which leads to alumni engagement as described by Weerts et al. (2009) as well as serve as a strong recruiting tool for the admissions office.

Motivation and Satisfaction

As Weerts and Ronca (2007) noted, alumni engage with the alma mater as a result of their motivation to do so. In this study, motivation by alumni was predicted to be positively related to satisfaction with the alumni relationship. A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted between alumni motivation and overall alumni satisfaction. There was a significant positive relationship between alumni motivation and alumni satisfaction, $r(300) = .232, p < .001$. These findings supported both the hypothesis and the prior research by Weerts et al. (2007). This may iterate to the college that a strong alumni relations program is essential. Such a service could implement alumni programs and provide a continuous link to the institution.

Conclusion

In summary, findings from the current study supported earlier studies and revealed that respondents were motivated to engage as alumni as a result of many factors, including student experiences, affinity for the institution, and points of contact (Astin, 1999; Olsen, 1965; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). These findings could provide the college with the basic framework around which to build alumni volunteer programs and philanthropic endeavors.

The study also revealed the positive relationship between motivation and engagement and staying connected with the institution through multiple connecting points, which was also found by Korvas (as cited in Lawley, 2008). Specifically, these

results reflected previous findings that linked motivation to volunteering and/or donating and graduates' awareness of the needs of the alma mater (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007; Diamond & Kashyap, 1997). In addition, the findings indicated a relationship of engagement with the respondents' realization of the impact that giving has on the college, as also reported by House (1987), Taylor and Martin (1995), and Weerts and Ronca (2009). These findings may imply that the college should have a vibrant, proactive publication which regularly discusses the college's endeavors, reputation, and plans as well as its needs. Using this venue, the college could more effectively express the critical need for philanthropic assistance from its graduates.

The study is also consistent with other research as it indicates alumni are motivated to volunteer and/or donate to the college because the institution prepared them for their careers (Chadwick-Jones, 1976), the college has a positive reputation (Weerts & Ronca, 2007), and the alumni are emotionally attached to the institution (Barber, 2010; Beeler, 1982). It is important for the college to recognize and publicize these findings. Additionally, it may be important for the college to include efforts such as career preparation in its strategic plan as this leads to a positive reputation and therefore affinity for the institution. Career preparation could be a tool for advancement staff to use to effectively engage alumni.

The alumni's concern for current students was evidenced through the study and proves consistent with Erikson's Theory of Human Development as described by Huyck and Hoyer (1982) and reaffirmed by Hummel (2001). Hummel's affirmation that alumni want to do something for the alma mater is exceptionally relevant to the college, especially as it relates to private giving for those in the 40-65 year age range. This stage

of life coincides with a time when alumni are more capable of giving back (Weerts & Ronca, 2008) and may imply to the college that it should focus its fundraising efforts on this age group. Integrating Erikson's theory with Hummel's considerations that alumni want to help, the college's fundraising efforts should focus on the current students, parlaying the need for help into the opportunity to help by the alumni.

Since administrators rely on alumni donations and volunteerism (Weerts & Ronca, 2007), and this study found that motivation to volunteer and give back to the alma mater, the college should seek ways to stay connected to its graduates. Some of the possible ways that the college could connect with alumni include providing impactful publications featuring student-focused material; regular public speaking venues for key administrators, faculty, and students in which they discuss the merits of the students along with the college's overall achievements; and both on-campus and off-campus alumni functions that have a structured purpose. Routine reports to alumni on student involvement, academic reputation, and college accomplishments can showcase the college's successes and provide the venue to tell the story of its history, present efforts, and future intentions. These factors help motivate alumni and enhance affinity for the alma mater and thereby alumni engagement.

Future research might be conducted on particular academic disciplines to learn more about alumni relationships with specific programs. This could help determine if factors such as hands-on learning play as significant a role in the disciplines, thereby helping chart the course for the academic agenda. Other research might be conducted to determine the most beneficial types of connecting points for alumni. As this study revealed, awareness of collegiate endeavors is key to the alumni relationship. Keeping

graduates informed and updated is critically important. Another possible future research effort might involve identifying the specific types of information about the college that is most desirable from the perspective of the alumni. Findings from each of these possible future endeavors would assist the college as it prioritizes strategic plans to include development and alumni relations objectives. More research on the college's donors would possibly reveal specific giving trends and thereby help staff calculate the best means to focus giving appeals. This additional information would prove helpful in concentrating efforts of the college in a time when state dollars are dwindling and the need for alumni engagement is on the rise.

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Appendix A:
Dissertation Proposal

A Study of Factors Which Influence the Lifecycle of
Alumni Satisfaction and Engagement

A Proposal submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Educational Leadership

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
of the Dewar College of Education

June 16, 2012

Keith D. Barber

M.A., Appalachian State University, 1991
B.S., Appalachian State University, 1990

Abstract

This will be a study of factors and issues that influence alumni satisfaction and engagement. The study will be a journal-ready dissertation composed of two works. The dissertation will consist of a literature review examining research and theory related to factors influencing alumni satisfaction and engagement, as well as factors affecting alumni motivation and philanthropy. A quantitative study using data collected from a survey of graduates from a state college in Georgia will be used to identify factors and influences on alumni engagement and satisfaction. Finally, recommendations will be generated from the review of the literature and the study addressing awareness and implementation of the factors found to be critical to alumni satisfaction and engagement in terms of the student experience, alumni motivation, alumni volunteerism and alumni donating.

A Study of Factors Which Influence the Lifecycle of
Alumni Satisfaction and Engagement

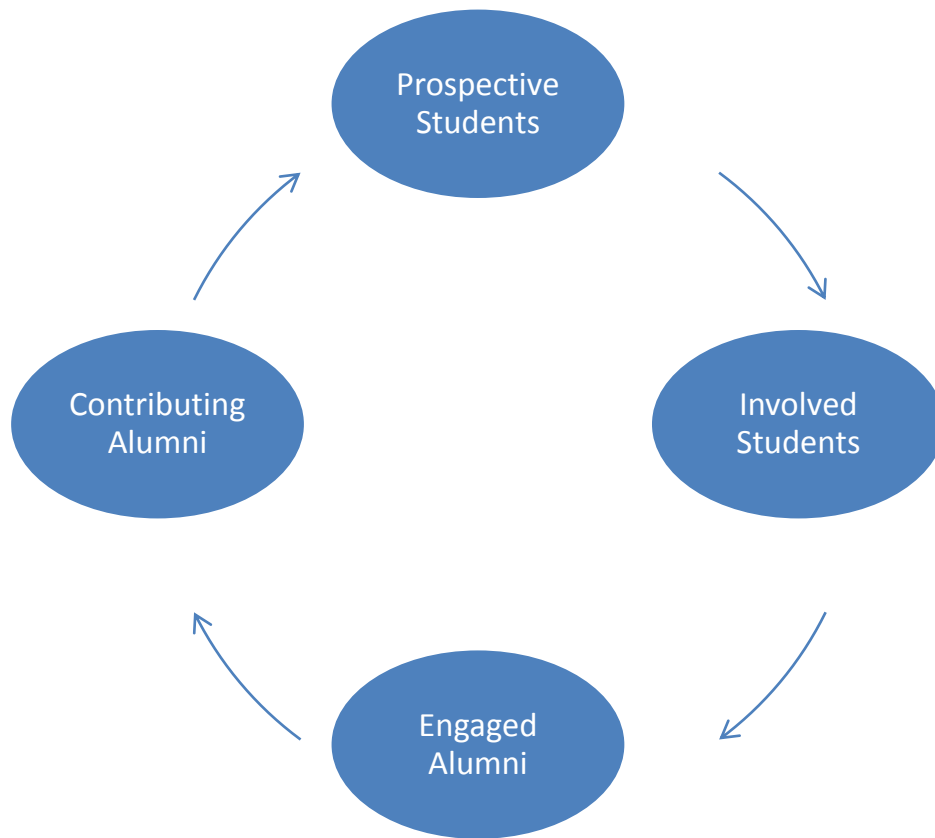
As competition for students intensifies, traditional budgets for colleges' needs are reduced, and colleges seek external provisions to meet needs, institutions must rely more heavily on alumni to address the ever-changing collegiate landscape. Small, rural colleges are faced with even greater challenges in these areas due to geographic location, smaller student bodies and alumni bases, and historically minimal alumni engagement. This study will explore the critical factors that influence alumni engagement, satisfaction, and motivation at rural state colleges in Georgia and the opportunities for these colleges to involve these graduates in their missions.

From student recruitment to alumni involvement, higher education institutions rely on a lifecycle of connections that begin with recruitment. Recruitment is a vital first step in a potential lifelong journey with the student and the institution. Hummel (2001) pointed out the recruitment process is "the first formal point of contact for a potential student" (p. 9), while Baade and Sundberg (1996) contended that an institution's "admission policy is obviously a crucial determinant of future alumni generosity" (p. 80). Once recruited and subsequently admitted, Astin (1999) reported that "the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (pp. 528-529). Student involvement is a major predictor of a graduate's engagement as an alumnus, encompassing involvement in fundraising, political concerns, mentoring, and volunteering (Weertz & Ronca, 2008).

Alumni of state colleges often refer to their alma maters with passion and conviction, using terms such as "family," "opportunity," "dedicated professors," and

“work ethic” (Barber, 2010). This relationship is best associated with the “belongingness and love needs” level of Maslow’s (1943) Hierachry of Needs, connecting the alumnus with the organization on a deep, personal level. In addition, researchers such as Berkowitz (1968), Diamond and Kashyap (1997), and Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) noted the link between alumni perceptions about gift impact and institutional need. These characteristics of affection and motivation provide a framework for lifelong engagement by the alumnus with the institution as indicated in Figure 1.

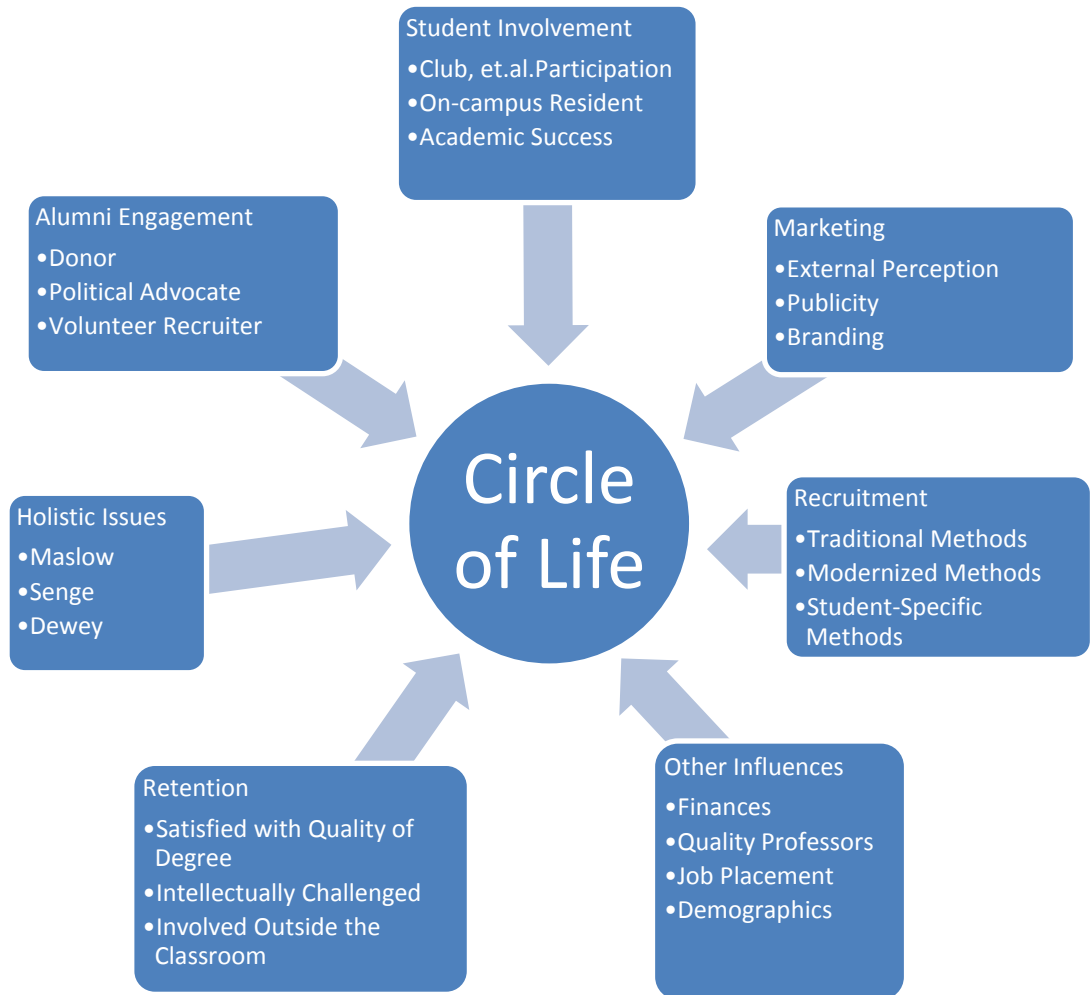
Figure 1. Circle of Life for Institutional Interaction.



The development of this continuous connection from student recruit to engaged alumnus is significantly more important for small, rural state institutions. With limited recruitment resources and smaller student and alumni bases, these schools can and must take advantage of graduates’ devotion and loyalty to enhance their lifelong connections to

the institution. Figure 2 illustrates the means by which institutions of higher education can engage students and alumni in order to maintain and develop their lifelong connectivity with their schools.

Figure 2. Engagement Opportunities for Alumni.



Alumni Engagement: Influencing Factors (General)

Political science, sociology, and social psychology offer expansive assessments with regards to factors that influence a person’s involvement with non-profit organizations. Penner’s (2002) definition of volunteerism includes the lasting, non-

mandatory, deliberate pro-communal conduct that benefits others and commonly occurs in a societal environment. The literature suggests that volunteerism is shaped by multiple factors, including family history and culture, experiences from youth to adulthood, family demographics, the individual's age, and collegiate experiences and affinity for the institution (see Beeler, 1982; Dugan, Millin, & Siegfried, 2000; Gardner, 1975; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Rusbult, 1980; Shadoian, 1989; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001; and Zuzanek & Smale, 1999).

Studies by Dunham and Bengston (1992) and Zaff, Papillo, and Williams (2003) revealed that it is often civically-engaged parents who influence their children to volunteer, both by being role models for them and volunteers with them. Children experience this altruism and often becomes a volunteer like the parents. Youniss, Su, and Yates (1999) posited that adult volunteers are likely to come from upper socio-economic backgrounds and have prior volunteer service experience. Still, other studies point to socializing influences which promote collective values for the societal good as influencers of volunteerism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Serow and Dreyden (1990) asserted that involvement in religious activities is associated with more probable involvement in civic service.

Weerts and Ronca (2009) noted the influences of youth experiences on adult volunteerism. For example, Ladewig and Thomas (1987) observed that participation in 4-H and other youth organizations is a predictor of membership and leadership in civic associations in adulthood. Wentzel and McNamara (1999) "found that positive relationships with peers as early as middle school predicted civic behaviors" (as cited by Weerts & Ronca, 2009, p. 350). Several studies link volunteerism by high school

students to a likelihood of volunteerism in young adulthood (see Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Glanville, 1999; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). Astin (1999) further determined that volunteer work in college correlated positively to volunteer work after college completion. Brown and Ferris (2007) found there is a greater propensity for volunteer activities in relationship to the amount of college completed, with college graduates participating in almost five more volunteer experiences annually than those without college experiences. Among persons age 25 and over, 42.3% of college graduates volunteered in 2010, compared to 17.9% of high school graduates, and 8.8% of those with less than a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Grube and Piliavin (2000) suggested that the more satisfied a person is with an organization, the greater her likelihood to volunteer for that organization.

Weerts and Ronca (2009) asserted that likelihood of volunteer “participation relates to capacity and demographic characteristics” (p. 351). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), women volunteer at a higher rate than men across age groups, education levels, and other major determining factors. Shaw and Taylor (1995) noted that these gender disparities correspond with higher education philanthropy, signifying that women are more likely to volunteer at higher education institutions than men, particularly in the area of donations. In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reported that persons in the age range of 35-44 years old are most likely to volunteer, while persons in their early twenties were least likely to volunteer. This study further noted that parents with children age 18 or under are substantially more likely to volunteer (33.6%) than persons without children (23.5%). These factors impact discretionary/leisure time and use, according to Zuzanek and Smale (1999).

For small, rural colleges, the capacity and inclination of alumni to give and to volunteer is very important. The need to rely on the institution's graduates in a variety of ways has become more paramount, as has the decision of which graduates need to be approached, when to approach them, and how to approach them for their services. The student experience is often the key for the institution to make these important decisions.

Alumni Engagement: Student Involvement Influences

Student involvement is a major predictor of a graduate's engagement as an alumnus, including involvement in fundraising, political concerns, mentoring, and volunteering (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Purmerantz (2005) stated, "The experience that students have is critical to the development of their future intention for giving back to their alma mater" (p. 290). Weerts and Ronca (2008) also indicated that engaged alumni directly and indirectly provide positive impacts on their alma maters by giving their time and resources. Alumni of rural-based schools often refer to their alma maters with passion and conviction, using terms such as "family," "opportunity," "dedicated professors," and "work ethic" (Barber, 2010).

Student involvement at the undergraduate level plays a significant role in the enrichment of the whole student. Abrahamowicz (as cited in Hunt & Rentz, 1994) asserted that such involvement positively affects students' overall gratification with the collegiate experience, cultivates further pursuit of academics, and enhances personal growth and maturity. Astin's Student Involvement Theory (originally published in 1984 and reprinted in 1999) captured multiple aspects of college which impact student involvement. He reported that "the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (pp. 528-529).

Miller and Jones (as cited in Fitch, 1991) made a strong statement for extracurricular, outside-the-classroom programs, going so far as to state they should be viewed as fundamental elements of the curriculum. Colleges that engage their students will find that the students are more positively impacted. This is a compelling reason to believe that the involved student-turned-engaged graduate will likely support the alma mater.

Influences on student learning and personal growth are connected to student achievement. Astin (1999) noted the impact of residence, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and student-faculty interaction on student development. Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, and Lovell (1999) referred to the influences participation in Greek organizations, general clubs and organizations, peer interaction, and employment have on students. In their review of more than 1,500 studies, Feldman and Newcomb (1994) further substantiated the effects that college has on students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Colleges would do well to take note of those positive connectors and seek ways to integrate them into campus objectives.

Motivational theories can be applied to student involvement. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory explains how specific needs drive people at particular life stages. He stated, "The appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need" (p. 370). The level of "belongingness and love needs" best represents involved students in that they share "a sense of belonging, a feeling of inclusion, group relationships, and social connections," according to Hummel (2001, p. 6). Dewey's epic 1897 "My Pedagogic Creed" (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2009) is also relevant to student involvement. Dewey stated "that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic

union of individuals” (p. 35). He further noted that “all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race...and is continually shaping the individual’s powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas, and arousing his feelings and emotions” (p. 34). Astin (1999) provided further support for this perspective when he spoke of the individualized (eclectic) theory:

[This theory] assumes that no single approach to subject matter, teaching, or resource allocation is adequate for all students. Rather, it attempts to identify the curricular content and instructional methods that best meet the needs of the individual student. With its emphasis on borrowing what is most useful from other pedagogical approaches, this flexible approach could also be termed *eclectic*. (p. 521)

Rural state colleges should consider and massage these concepts to assist the student in finding success, thereby reinforcing a positive attitude toward the institution. Pumerantz (2005) succinctly stated: “Happy students make happy alumni” (p. 290).

In summary, much is to be said about student involvement in college. Noting the importance of student satisfaction from both in-classroom and outside-classroom curricula, institutions can augment feelings of belonging, self-actualization, and positive emotions, which will benefit both the student and the institution. These are especially important to the rural college, which counts on its current and former students to share their testimonies and experiences for the purpose of engaging alumni (Barber, 2010).

Alumni Engagement: Philanthropy

Over the past three decades, much scholarly research has been conducted on alumni engagement. Of that research, alumni philanthropy has been the most

prominently investigated topic because of institutions' need for private support (Burke, 1988; Caboni & Proper, 2008). Many studies have examined specific variables that influence alumni donations, including: family income, numbers and ages of dependents, and student debt (Olsen, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Other studies have investigated the impact of the collegiate experience on alumni donors (Clotfelter, 2003; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Thomas & Smart, 2005). Additional research has focused on graduates' attitudes about institutional needs (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007; Bierkowitz, 1968; Diamond & Kashyap, 1997; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), while other studies have examined the impacts of gifts on the institution (Center on Philanthropy, 2009; Weerts & Ronca, 2009).

Rural state colleges are included in the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) fiscal year 2010 report regarding education finance. This report signified the national decrease in state and local funding during its report cycle. According to its fiscal 2010 report:

State and local government financial commitment to higher education has increased substantially over the past several decades . . . [However] a recession beginning in 2008 dramatically reduced state revenue and ended the growth in state and local support achieved between 2004 and 2008. . . . Analysis of the data indicates that constant dollar per student state and local funding for public colleges and universities decreased between 2009 and 2010. State and local support . . . per full-time-equivalent [FTE] student was \$6,454 in 2010, a \$497 constant dollar (or 7 percent) decrease from 2009, and the lowest in the last 25 years. (p. 7)

Tuition dollars make up a significant portion of funding in higher education (40.3% in 2010 according to the SHEEO report, p. 24). In addition to the decline of public funding, the same report noted the national increase in higher education enrollment during these years:

This decrease in per student support . . . was driven by an increase in enrollments of more than 6 percent between 2009 and 2010. Higher education has historically experienced large increases in enrollment during times of economic recession, and this tendency has been accentuated by the growing economic importance of postsecondary education. Nationally, FTE enrollment grew 6 percent between 2009 and 2010, 15 percent between 2005 and 2010, and 35 percent between 2000 and 2010. (pp. 7-8)

According to Board of Regents University System of Georgia Semester Enrollment Reports (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011), similar increases in the numbers of students and similar decreases in per FTE support has occurred at institutions classified as state colleges in the System. Since state colleges rely heavily on student tuition for budget purposes, this equates to a loss of revenue at these institutions.

Alumni giving is particularly important to the state college that depends heavily on public funding and tuition dollars. Administrators rely on alumni donations and need to understand key predictors of alumni capacity and inclination for giving (Weerts & Ronca, 2007) . Bekkers and Wiepking (2007) assessed over 500 studies on the characteristics of giving, including motivations for giving. Weerts and Ronca (2009) collapsed these findings into four groups: “awareness of need and efficacy; solicitation;

costs and benefits; and altruism and ‘impure’ altruism” (p. 96). Understanding these data can assist institutions as they seek donors to help off-set declining budgets.

Prospective donors must be aware of the needs of the organization (Berkowitz, 1968, Bierkowitz & Daniels, 1964; Schwartz, 1975). Weerts and Ronca (2009) cited several alumni-specific studies which used the variable “perceived need for financial support” (efficacy) as an important indicator of giving (see Diamond & Kashyap, 1997; House, 1987; Miracle, 1977; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Equally, it is important that donors perceive that their giving makes a difference. According to Weerts and Ronca (2009), “awareness and efficacy can be best understood through expectancy theory, suggesting that people give based on whether they feel that the organization needs their support and whether their gift will make a difference to the organization (see Vroom, 1964)” (p. 96).

Most donations occur because the donor was solicited (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007), with one study finding that 85% of gifts occurred ensuing a solicitation (Bryant, Slaughter, Kang, & Tax, 2003). Several researchers have acknowledged that expenditures on advancement programs are positively correlated with increased giving by graduates (Baade & Sundber, 1996; Harrison, 1995; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Okunade, 1996). Weerts and Ronca (2009) asserted that successful solicitation strategies are likely to be positively influenced by the increased awareness of needs and the assurance that alumni giving makes a difference at the institution.

Costs and benefits of alumni giving refer to the amount of resources needed by a donor to make a gift. Beker and Wiepking (2007) cited multiple studies which reveal that when costs are minimized, giving is enhanced (see Bekkers, 2005; Eckel & Grossman, 2003, 2004; Karlan & List, 2006). This construct lends to tax policy impacts on charitable

giving (Feldstein, 1975; Feldstein & Taylor, 1976; Hood, Martin, & Osberg, 1977; Kitchin & Dalton, 1990). That is, donors are eligible for certain tax deductions based on gifts to non-profit organizations. Costs and benefits may also reflect competition from other non-profit organizations. Weerts and Ronca (2009) argued that alumni donors may support new non-profit organizations or increase their support for charities other than the school. They stated, “These alternative giving options may crowd out opportunities for increased levels of giving to the institution” (p. 97). Contrary to this theory, House (1987) and Miracle (1977) proposed that those who give to their alma maters are often more gift-inclined and therefore will give to multiple non-profit organizations. Weerts and Ronca (2009) note another cost and benefits aspect derived from giving levels related to the quality of the donor’s collegiate experience: higher levels of donations correspond with exceptional academic and social involvements experienced by the alumnus. The researchers explain:

For example, studies have found that alumni-giving is related to the amount of money that the university spent on the alum (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Harrison, Mitchell, & Peteron, 1995). Benefits may also relate to the amount the institution invested in the alumni while a student, since alumni-giving is often understood as a desire to repay the institution for education or recognition of academic benefits received (Leslie & Ramey, 1988). For instance, mentoring in college (Clotfelter, 2003), favorable faculty/student ratio and strong academic reputation (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2001), and frequent contact with faculty and staff (Monks, 2003) are associated with alumni giving. In addition, alumni contributions have been shown to increase with increases in grade point average

(GPA) (Marr, Mullen, & Siegfried, 2005). Social experiences in college are also important as many studies link alumni-giving to involvement in extracurricular activities while a student (see Dugan, Mullin, & Siegfried 2000; Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson 1995; Monks 2003). (p. 97)

Meer and Rosen (2012) have recently published a report derived from a fifteen year analysis of a private institution. This work concludes that students who take out loans are less likely to donate. Additionally, these researchers found that students who receive scholarships tend to donate less than peers who did not receive aid, a vast contradiction to traditional thinking on the subject.

Weerts and Ronca (2009) referred to research conducted by Keating, Pitts, and Appel (1981) which suggested that philanthropists donate to non-profit organizations because of their intent to provide goods and services to society, that is, altruism. 'Impure' altruism refers to donors who are driven to give by individual intangible values (Andreoni, 1989). Such intangible incentives include enhanced self-esteem or group connections (Keating et al., 1981), enhanced reputation, reverence, alliances, and other positive social and psychological advantages (Olson, 1965). With regard to alumni giving, Maude (1997) suggested the institutional affiliation may increase one's self-esteem or personal rewards due to a renewed affiliation with their institution. Such intangible benefits have been shown by Yoo and Harrison (1989) to directly correlate with alumni gifts. Weerts and Ronca (2009) further noted that alumni emotional attachments to the institution are important predictors of alumni giving and if the rewards are positive, giving is elevated. As another indicator, Weerts and Ronca (2009) referred to studies by Okunade and Berl (1997) and Wunnava and Lauze (2001) when they

suggested that “family legacy adds significant financial, time, and emotional investment in a campus, and these ties are associated with alumni giving” (p. 98). In addition, Korvas (1984) noted that alumni who have extended and intimate connections with their institution are more likely to give to their alumni institution.

Engaging alumni and causing them to reflect on their collegiate experiences enhances the propensity of graduates to financially support their alma mater. Rural state colleges can take advantage of this information to increase budgets.

Alumni Engagement: Theories

Inclination (motivation) to engage is paramount to alumni involvement. Kotler and Armstrong (1993) stated, “A motivated person is ready to act. How the person acts is influenced by his or her perception of the situation” (p. 137). Several motivational theories appear to have an effect on alumni engagement.

Maslow (1943) advocated that all motivated behavior “must be understood to be a channel through which any basic needs may be simultaneously expressed or satisfied” (p. 370). Maslow’s five-stage Hierarchy of Needs model describes how people are driven by certain needs at certain times. His stages are: biological and physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. He explained that “the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need” (p. 370). Hummel (2001) suggested that alumni engagement occurs at the belongingness and love needs level, “since positive alumni relationships share the same characteristics: a sense of belonging, a feeling of inclusion, group relationships, and social connections” (p. 6). This theory explains the “why” of alumni engagement.

Also applicable to alumni engagement is Erikson's Theory of Human Development (described in Huyck & Hoyer, 1982). Erikson expressed human development relative to eight stages, each representing an essential challenge to the ego that the individual must confront and resolve. Hummel (2001) suggested that the seventh ego challenge – generativity versus stagnation – is relevant to alumni involvement, particularly to alumni giving. This stage generally occurs in middle adulthood (40-65 years of age). Hummel further quoted the definition of the stage:

Generativity versus stagnation: The next challenge for the mature ego is to establish a sense of generativity and overcome stagnation, a challenge often associated with middle age. Generativity involves a deeper concern for the welfare of future generations and a willingness to work with the younger adults who will inherit leadership. This concern is based on appreciation of the uniqueness and rights of others. (p. 7)

With regard to alumni engagement, Hummel asserted that institutions should build ties with middle-aged alumni, including connecting them “in direct and indirect contact with future leaders – today's students” (p. 7). According to Huyck and Hoyer, and subsequently reinforced by Hummel, Erikson's theory forecasts the “when” of alumni engagement.

Bickhard (1980) offered a concept on developmental normativity and normative development. He suggested that personal development occurs “within the constraint and framework of a hierarchy of interactive representational levels” (p. 75). He further asserted that the “problem with motivation is often construed as the problem of what makes the system do something rather than nothing” (p. 66). He contended that people

are inherently interacting in order to survive, so the question is not whether something will be done, but “what determines what will be engaged in next” (p. 72). In relation to alumni engagement, Hummel (2001) said Bickhard’s work “supports the need for a university to design solid engagement programs, so that alumni will have a clear message about what their university needs or expects from them” (p. 8). Bickhard’s work emphasizes the significance of the “what” of alumni engagement.

Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested three conceptual models relevant to inclination of alumni support: social exchange theory, expectancy theory, and the investment model. Social exchange theory implies that affiliations are reciprocal and often consist of unequal partnerships. This theory asserts that associations are considered in terms of economics and credit and debts are assessed to determine if the affiliation will continue (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Weerts and Ronca (2007) applied the theory to alumni involvement by suggesting “that the cost of volunteering (time, expertise, political connections) are weighed against the benefits the alum has received from the university in the past or present (quality of education, career gains, social connections, and prestige). The alumni donor will make a decision about whether to volunteer based on an analysis of this exchange” (p. 278). These authors maintained that alumni support is anticipated by the individual’s current or past perceptions of his value of the institution, including whether or not the graduate received financial aid as a student. Dugan, Mullin, and Siegfried (2000) found that alumni who received academic scholarships as students were inclined to increase gift size compared to those receiving no scholarships. Similarly, Monks (2003) found those who received financial aid as students gave more than those with loan debt. Based on these studies, Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested

that alumni donors may be more inclined to provide volunteer time if they received financial help as students.

Expectancy theory is a summary of why individuals chose one behavior over others (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). In so doing, it explains how the individual makes decisions to achieve end results. “The *expectancy* is the belief that one's effort will result in attainment of desired performance goals. This belief, or perception, is generally based on an individual's past experience, self-confidence (often termed self-efficacy), and the perceived difficulty of the performance standard or goal” (Scholl, “Motivation Expectancy Theory”). Applied to alumni engagement, Weerts and Ronca (2007) suggested that alumni construct expectancies about upcoming events and adapt their behavior around these events. The authors contended that alumni weigh institutional involvement on whether or not they can make a difference to the institution and thereby achieve success in their role as institution volunteers. Weerts and Ronca further applied Vroom’s classic 1964 work to alumni motivation. They contend that alumni engagement centers on three dynamics:

- (1) Valence: the value of the perceived outcome or the personal stakes of volunteering.
- (2) Instrumentality: the belief that volunteering will help the university achieve a certain outcome.
- (3) Expectancy: that the alumni donor [defined by philanthropy and volunteerism] feels capable of successfully completing the volunteer actions. (p. 278)

Weerts and Ronca (2007) surmised that institutions influence alumni expectations and alumni establish volunteer decisions from these expectations. As an example, Harrison (1995) claimed that institutions expend a considerable amount of time and money to

shape alumni expectations in order to persuade graduates to give and/or volunteer.

Applied to alumni engagement, Weerts and Ronca proposed that expectancy theory suggests that alumni considerations are influenced by the institution and the alumni will weigh these considerations in their decisions to be involved or not be involved with the school.

The investment model contends that one's dedication to a relationship fluctuates on how content we are about the costs and rewards of that relationship and what we see as a fair balance in it; a comparison with potential alternate relationships; and how much a person has already put into the relationship (Changing Minds.Org). Weerts and Ronca (2007) applied the model to alumni engagement. They contended that the model predicts that alumni involvement is based on the satisfaction level of the alumnus regarding the amount of time, emotion, and energy he has heretofore afforded the institution. This is significant to alumni engagement as several studies have shown that emotional attachment is a predictor of alumni connection (Beeler, 1982; Gardner, 1975; Shadoian, 1989). Referencing the work of Okunade and Berl (1997) and Wunnava and Lauze (2001), Weerts and Ronca further suggested that families with multiple generations of attendees of the institution are associated with alumni support due to their continued affiliation with the institution.

As noted above, Astin's Student Involvement Theory proposes many influences on college students. This theory centering on student-based issues is substantiated by other investigators (see Abrahamowicz as cited by Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Astin, 1984; Barber, 2010; Feldman & Newcomb, 1994; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999; Miller & Jones as cited in Fitch, 1991; Purmerantz, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2008).

Several theories and conceptual models can be applied to alumni engagement for state colleges in Georgia.

Statement of the Problem

The continuous connection from student recruit to engaged alumnus is significantly important for small, rural state institutions. However, information about alumni engagement factors at these institutions is limited. Because of finite resources and the need for graduates to be involved with their alma mater on all fronts, it is more important than ever for state colleges to understand how to structure student activities and alumni programs to take advantage of graduates' devotion and loyalty to enhance their lifelong connections to the institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to examine factors from the institutional experiences that have the most impact on alumni engagement in a state college in the State University System of Georgia (SUS). This research will help the institution understand ways to better meet the needs and expectations of its students and graduates, thereby enabling future support from alumni. The resulting conclusions of the study should also prove beneficial for extrapolation to other institutions both within the state SUS as well as outside it.

Because one of the highest levels of alumni commitment is through financial contributions to the institution, variables associated with alumni donors and alumni non-donors will be analyzed to better inform the institution of alumni engagement and philanthropy. Additionally, other means of engagement by graduates can be just as

important for institutions (recruiting new students, political advocacy, etc.), so these, too, will be examined.

Similar studies have been conducted by others, as previously noted. This study's theoretical basis of content is modeled after a study reported by Hummel (2001), which was part of her requirements for the Master of Arts degree at the University of Lethbridge. However, the gathering of data and methods of analysis are distinctly different from Hummel's effort. This study also differs from Hummel's work in that the scope and mission of the institution and its focus is different, and therefore the students and alumni are different. Additionally, Hummel's original study examined a 43-year-old Canadian university in a large metropolitan city, while this study will focus on a 104-year-old State College in rural, south Georgia, United States. To more accurately reflect the institution of focus, questions within the instrument itself differ from those questions asked in Hummel's study.

Introduction and Research Questions

The lifecycle of alumni engagement is impacted by factors associated with the collegiate experience, both while a student and then later as an alumnus. These factors and their relationships will be examined in this study. The fundamental research question framing the study is: *What factors in the student experience and alumni relationship influence alumni engagement and satisfaction?* This question is addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. What are the general characteristics of the survey respondents?
2. Is there a significant relationship between these general characteristics and alumni engagement?

3. Is there a significant relationship between student experience factors and alumni engagement and alumni satisfaction?
4. Is there a significant relationship between alumni experience factors and alumni engagement and alumni satisfaction?
5. Is there a significant relationship between awareness of alumni/volunteer/donor involvement and motivation to volunteer or donate?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the level of satisfaction with the student experience and motivation to volunteer or donate?
7. Is there a significant relationship between institutional reputation and motivation to volunteer or donate?
8. Is there a significant relationship between career preparation and motivation to volunteer or donate?
9. What is the significance of the relationship between motivation to volunteer or donate and satisfaction with alumni experience?

Population and Sample

This research will be conducted on alumni of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC), a state college within the State University System of Georgia (SUS). The total alumni population of ABAC is approximately 42,000. A sample size of 6,500 (16%) will be taken from the general alumni population. This is a convenience sample as a survey instrument will be administered to all alumni with valid e-mail addresses in the alumni database at ABAC at a particular point in time. Since valid e-mail contact information will be the method of communication, the potential participants will be alumni who have provided current e-mail information, therefore these graduates will have previously demonstrated some level of engagement with the institution in this manner. A link to the survey will also be available on the college's Facebook page. Respondents via

this manner will have also demonstrated some level of proactive engagement with the institution.

Participants will be recruited through an e-mail request administered via ABAC's Office of College Advancement (OCA) through its Raiser's Edge alumni records software program. This secure program houses all ABAC alumni data and is monitored by the institution to ensure security of information. Its access is limited to a no more than ten OCA staff members. The electronic instrument used will have an ABAC return address in anticipation that recipients will be more trusting of the study and its privacy controls if coming from the institution and therefore more inclined to participate in the study. For this research, alumni will be administered a survey adopted from a survey initially reported by Hummel (2001). The wording within the instrument will be modified to fit the characteristics of a State College in Georgia. For example, the original study requests a response on the Alumni Engagement Variable of "Desire to support research." ABAC does not conduct research, therefore this item will be re-worded as: "Desire to support academic programs."

Data Collection and Instrumentation

This study will use quantitative methods to answer the research questions. Two assumptions are made: 1) the foundation for alumni engagement is established during the time that the individual is a student at the institution and 2) alumni engagement can be influenced by the institution at many points throughout life via the alumni-institution relationship.

A survey will be used to collect data from participants at a single point in time. To address alumni satisfaction with their student experience and characteristics related to

alumni experiences, the survey will use Likert scales with forced-choice options (e.g., very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). Allen and Seaman (2007) noted that Likert scales' variables usually represent an underlying continuous measure. Garland (1991) reported that the denial of a mid-point (that is, a scale with an even number of answer options) often results in more negative responses than when a mid-point is available. Worcester and Burns (1975) reported that respondents provide more positive responses when mid-points are omitted. Although contradictory in results, this instrument will use both, since each is appropriate for varying items. For other items, the instrument allows for yes/no responses. Moreover, Schmertzing, Stelzer, and Schmertzing (2002) demonstrated the value of including a qualitative element in survey research to further the understanding of the data.

Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine (2004) argued that electronic surveys have substantially faster response rates, significantly lower associated costs, and considerable lower data conversion rates when compared to hard-copy surveys delivered via traditional mail efforts. The survey will contain 30 questions (29 quantitative; the final question will be optional and qualitative in nature). The questions will be grouped into three sections: (A) General Information, to elicit demographic data such as age, race, gender, degree, and residence; (B) Student Experience, to produce social and academic data based on the individual's involvements while a student at ABAC; and (C) Alumni Engagement, to obtain data regarding alumni engagement such as event participation, communication with the institution, emotional and motivating factors association with the college, and philanthropic efforts by the respondent.

The method for access and completion will be as follows:

- Alumni for whom the Office of College Advancement holds valid e-mail addresses will be invited by email to participate in the survey.
- Simultaneous to the e-mail, the same link will be made available via the college's Facebook page.
- The survey will be made available through a Web link in the e-mail message as well as on the college's Facebook page, both accessible through this click point.
- A brief introduction and overview of the survey will precede the instrument.
- Before beginning the actual survey, participants will be required to sign-in (to validate the respondent is an ABAC alumnus) and complete a consent form.
- Instructions and information will be included throughout the instrument. A page notation will be included to notify respondents of their progress. The survey will include a fill-in-the-blank option to capture years associated with the alumnus' departure from ABAC. The response "Other (please specify)" will be offered for certain questions to provide alumni the opportunity to add a response category that might be overlooked in the survey.
- Responses will be required for every question on a page before advancing to the next page. (This will not apply to the final question.)
- The final question will be open-ended and structured to allow alumni to provide comments about their institutional experiences and/or the survey.

- The survey will be available to the sample population for a ten-day period.

E-mail and social media (Facebook) will be used to distribute the instrument for two reasons. First, these are the two primary contact mechanisms that the college has with its alumni. Second, these methods will provide greater contact opportunity with the target population. According to the Pew Research Center (2012):

E-mail remains the most popular activity for older internet users, but among young online adults, social networking sites are just as much a part of the daily routine as e-mail. Web sites like Facebook are becoming increasingly popular among older internet users; the number of online adults ages 50 and older on social networking sites nearly doubled in the past year. But on a typical day, while a majority of online adults ages 50-64 (60%) and ages 65 and older (55%) send and receive email, relatively few check in with their friends and family via social networking sites (20% and 13%). Among online adults ages 18-29, however, there is little difference between the two online activities. Fully 60% of young adults visit a social networking site daily, and relatively the same number (62%) send and receive e-mail daily. It should not be too surprising that young adults are more likely to visit a social networking site than are older adults, considering they are still much more likely to be users. But nearly all online adults, young and old, use email at least occasionally.

(<http://pewresearch.org/databank/dailynumber/?NumberID=1088>)

The survey will be e-mailed to alumni at a specific time on a pre-determined date during the spring semester of the academic year. Simultaneously, the survey link will be listed on the college's alumni Facebook page. This will be done for three reasons: (1) to take advantage of the sentimental nostalgia that is often present around the institution's largest annual graduation ceremonies as they are reminded of this through media recognition; (2) to be available prior to the end of the K-12 school year in order to capture respondents who might be less available once summer vacations begin; and (3) so as not to interfere with other institutional communication.

“Response rates and times are best for surveys sent out between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., at the beginning of the work day – but not on Monday morning,” according to PeoplePulse (2011), therefore the e-mail inviting participation in the survey as well as the Facebook link will be simultaneously made available at this time. Other sources reinforce this practice as well as indicate that quicker response times are achieved when distributed as described (Hamilton, 2011).

The alumni information (including donor status and e-mail addresses) will be made available through the ABAC Office of College Advancement with permission granted for use by the ABAC administration.

Variables

Variables will be grouped into three categories: Demographic (Table 1), Student Experience (Table 2), and Alumni Engagement (Table 3).

Demographic variables include the following:

- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Date of entry into institution
- Degree(s)

Other pertinent factors in the graduate’s life that may influence the individual’s desire to associate with or contribute to the institution are important to the study. These factors include:

- Current geographic location
- Employment opportunities
- Career field choice

Table 1. Demographic Variables

Type	Variable
General	Age Gender Race Entrance date Student residence Year of completing ABAC program of study ABAC academic degree pursued Additional degrees completed at any institution Current residence
Career-Related	Extent ABAC degree prepared alumnus for chosen career Employment status Field of employment

Student Experience variables will include typical occurrences experienced by the vast majority of students:

- Administrative processes
- Student clubs and organizations

- Extra-curricular activities
- Student leadership
- Scholarship and financial aid
- Academic recognition
- Student residence

Other Student Experience variables will include participants’ awareness of and interaction with alumni, volunteers, and donors while the alumnus was a student. The respondents will also be asked to rate their overall level of satisfaction with their ABAC student experience.

Table 2. Student Experience Variables

Type	Variable
Administrative Processes	Admissions process Variety of course offerings Availability of required courses Quality of instruction in courses Relationship with faculty Relationship with staff Recruiting process Advising Career services Counseling or other student support services Overall level of satisfaction with ABAC student experiences
Student financial support	Scholarship Financial aid

Student involvement	Student clubs Academic recognition Volunteer projects Stallion athletics Intramural athletics Extracurricular programs Other organized student activities Club/ Student Government leadership Awareness of the role of alumni, volunteers, and donors Opportunities to interact with alumni, volunteers, and donors
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Variables related to Alumni Engagement will be focused on opportunities for alumni to feel a connection to the alma mater and to demonstrate support for the alma mater. This connection is identified through interactions with the college and factors that have or might inspire the alumnus to remain in contact with the institution. Connection variables will include those associated with alumni events and activities, communications, and other motivational issues that may cause a graduate to provide volunteerism and/or funding to the institution. Alumni commitment will be defined through characteristics of support or intended support and as both monetary (gifts) and non-monetary (volunteering at the college). Participants will be asked to rate their overall level of alumni satisfaction with ABAC.

Table 3. Alumni Engagement Variables

Type	Variable
Connection	Attending ABAC events Networking with other ABAC alumni Staying in touch with ABAC faculty or staff Serving on the ABAC Foundation Board of Trustees, the ABAC Alumni Association Board of Directors, the ABAC Ag Alumni Council, the ABAC ACTIONS Team, or another College-sponsored committee Volunteering for Alumni Association or alumni-related activity Donating to ABAC (or the ABAC Foundation, Inc.)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendships with other ABAC alumni Alumni business relationships with other ABAC alumni Emotional ties Alumni events on campus Alumni events in alumnus' own community Social networking Web sites ABAC Web-based or e-mailed updates ABAC's mailed publications
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciation for ABAC degree Appreciation for relationships with faculty Desire to support students Gratitude for personal student support Desire to support academic programs Awareness of ABAC's needs for financial support Matching programs through the alumnus' employer or professional association Recognition by ABAC for alumnus' contribution Overall level of satisfaction with alumni relationship with ABAC Organizational Identification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reputation Distinctiveness Prestige Quality of programs Contributions to academics Competitive excellence as compared to other State Colleges Accomplishments of students Accomplishments of alumni
Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer status Donor status

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analyses will be used for this research. These will include frequency counts, descriptive analysis, and tests of statistical significance. For some analyses, independent-samples *t* tests will be used to determine differences between variables. Correlation analyses will be used with other variables. Because some variables will be nominal and reported in categories, the chi-square test will be used to

compare the frequencies of actual results from frequencies of expected results (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Frankel and Wallen further suggested that the use of non-parametric methods is safer when the researcher cannot satisfy the standards of parametric methods. In addition, the expected number of completed surveys will also help strengthen this non-parametric test. The standard probability level of .05 ($p = .05$) will be used to determine if there is a significant relationship between the variables or if the differences occur by chance. This is the standard p -value used by education researchers (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Additionally, the one-way ANOVA will also be used for some questions. The analysis will be used for the sub-questions.

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Appendix B:

Institutional Review Board Consent Form



***Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants***

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

**PROTOCOL
NUMBER:**

IRB-02817-2012

INVESTIGATOR:

Keith D. Barber

PROJECT TITLE:

Dissertation Survey: Factors that Influence Alumni Engagement and Their Impacts

DETERMINATION:

- This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category 2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.
-

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

If you make any of these suggested changes to your protocol, please submit revisions so that IRB has a complete protocol on file.

Appendix C:
Letter of Cooperation



Abraham Baldwin
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
A State College of the University System of Georgia

Foundation

ABAC 13 • 2802 Moore Hwy. • Tifton, GA 31793-2601 • (229) 391-4900 • Fax (229) 391-4901 • foundation@abac.edu • www.abac.edu

April 18, 2012

Valdosta State University
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research
Psychology Building, Suite 3100
Valdosta, GA 31698

RE: Letter of Cooperation for Doctoral Research_K.Barber

Dear Colleagues at VSU:

Keith Barber (VSU # 870347883), a doctoral student at your institution, has requested permission to survey former Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) students through the ABAC Foundation, Inc. alumni database. His electronic survey will seek to better understand how and why former ABAC students engage as alumni and how this information may assist the College and Foundation in the future. This survey will not adversely affect the ABAC Foundation, Inc. or Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. On the contrary, this survey will assist us to better program student involvement and alumni engagement opportunities for our constituents. Mr. Barber has the permission of the ABAC Foundation, Inc. to survey our alumni.

Respectfully,

Melvin L. Merrill
President, ABAC Foundation, Inc.

Appendix D:
Survey

ABAC Alumni
Circle of Life

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled "ABAC's Circle of Life." This survey is being conducted by Keith Barber, a student at Valdosta State University. Keith is also an ABAC employee who has spent over twenty years in the advancement (alumni relations, development) arena.

This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey or to stop responding at any time. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Keith Barber at kbarber@abac.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

This survey is available until noon on May 11, 2012.

1. What is your current age? (fill in the blank)
2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Race
 - a. African American
 - b. American Indian
 - c. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - d. Caucasian
 - e. Hispanic
 - f. Other (please specify)
4. I first came to ABAC (check one):
 - a. In less than one year after completing high school
 - b. One year or more after completing high school
 - c. Transferred to ABAC after taking courses from another college
 - d. Other (please specify)

5. Did you live in on-campus student housing during any of your time at ABAC? (If you answer yes, please indicate number of years in the text box.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Check the option below that best describes your program of study at ABAC. (Check one)
 - a. Completed my Associates degree
 - b. Completed my Four-year degree
 - c. Earned a Certificate at ABAC
 - d. Transferred my hours to another institution, but did not earn a degree from ABAC
 - e. Did not transfer my hours to another institution, nor did I earn a degree from ABAC
 - f. Other (please specify)

7. How many years were you enrolled as a student at ABAC?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
 - f. 6
 - g. 7
 - h. Don't remember

8. What was the last year you were enrolled as a student at ABAC? (19xx or 20xx)

9. What degree did you pursue at ABAC? (Check all that apply)
 - a. AGRICULTURE (Agricultural Business, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Engineering, Animal Science, Diversified Agriculture, Plant Science, Turfgrass/Golf Course Management/Landscape)
 - b. BUSINESS (Business Administration, Economics, Information Technology, Marketing)
 - c. HUMAN SCIENCES (Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, Sociology/Psychology, Criminal Justice)
 - d. LIBERAL ARTS (Communications/Journalism, English, Fine Arts, History/Political Science, Music – Band or Choral)
 - e. NATURAL RESOURCES (Forestry, Soil Sciences, Wildlife)
 - f. NURSING
 - g. SCIENCE & MATHEMATICS (Mathematics, Science)
 - h. OTHER (please specify)

10. What academic degree(s) have you completed at any institution in any year, since leaving ABAC? (Check all that apply)
 - a. Additional associate's degree at ABAC

- b. Bachelor's degree at another institution
- c. Master's degree
- d. Ph.D.
- e. Ed.D.
- f. MD
- g. Juris Doctorate
- h. No additional degrees(s) obtained
- i. Other (please specify)

11. Where do you currently reside?

- a. Tifton, GA
- b. Outside of Tifton, but in South Georgia
- c. A region in Georgia other than South Georgia
- d. In the United States, but outside of Georgia
- e. Outside the United States

12. Are you currently employed?

- a. Full time
- b. Part time
- c. Retired
- d. Not employed

13. Thinking back to your time as an ABAC student, how satisfied were you with the College's administrative functions such as the admissions process, course advising, course offerings, support services, etc.?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied

14. While attending ABAC did you participate in organized extra-curricular student activities such as clubs, athletics, intramurals, band, choir, etc.?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Did you hold a leadership position with an ABAC-sanctioned club or organization such Student Government Association, Campus Activities Board, Horticulture Club, etc.?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Do you receive a student scholarship while attending ABAC? (HOPE is considered a scholarship.)

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. Did you receive financial aid (no-scholarship such as a Pell grant, Stafford loan, etc.) while attending ABAC?
- Yes
 - No
18. At any time, from your initial registration at ABAC to your departure from ABAC, did you receive recognition through an academic award of merit or distinction (such as Dean's List, Donaldson Award, etc.?)
- Yes
 - No
19. While you were an ABAC student, were you aware of (each experience requires a response):
- The role ABAC alumni played in the success of the College?
 - Yes
 - No, I was not aware
 - The role ABAC volunteers (non-alumni) played in the success of the College?
 - Yes
 - No, I was not aware
 - The role ABAC donors played in the success of the College?
 - Yes
 - No, I was not aware
20. As an ABAC student, did you (each experience requires a response):
- Interact with ABAC alumni – Yes No, not to my knowledge
 - Interact with ABAC donors – Yes No, not to my knowledge
21. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with your ABAC student experience:
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Dissatisfied
 - Very dissatisfied
22. In what field do you work?
- AGRICULTURE (Agricultural Business, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Engineering, Animal Science, Diversified Agriculture, Plant Science, Turfgrass/Golf Course Management/Landscape)
 - BUSINESS (Business Administration, Economics, Information Technology, Marketing)
 - HUMAN SCIENCES (Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, Sociology/Psychology, Criminal Justice)
 - LIBERAL ARTS (Communications/Journalism, English, Fine Arts, History/Political Science, Music – Band or Choral)
 - NATURAL RESOURCES (Forestry, Soil Sciences, Wildlife)
 - NURSING

- g. SCIENCE & MATHEMATICS (Mathematics, Science)
- h. OTHER (please specify)

23. Since leaving ABAC as a student have you ever volunteered for the College (e.g., alumni board), participated in College activities (e.g., homecoming), or donated to the College?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
24. Since leaving ABAC as a student, I have been motivated or might be motivated to give back to the College as a volunteer or donor (check all that apply):
- a. Because of my appreciation for the opportunities my ABAC degree has afforded me
 - b. Because of my appreciation for the relationships I had (or have) with faculty
 - c. Because of my gratitude for the financial support I received as a student
 - d. Because of my desire to support students
 - e. Because of my desire to support academic programs
 - f. Because of my awareness of ABAC's needs for financial support
 - g. Because of matching programs through my employer or professional association
 - h. Because of recognition by ABAC of my contribution as a volunteer or donor
 - i. Because someone at ABAC asked me
 - j. Other (please specify)
25. Have you had business relationships that included ABAC alumni?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
26. Since leaving ABAC, I have maintained my ABAC contacts through (check all that apply):
- a. Personal (face-to-face) relationships/friendships with alumni, faculty, and/or staff
 - b. Alumni events (on campus or off campus)
 - c. Social networking sites such as Facebook
 - d. ABAC's web-based updates
 - e. ABAC's mailed publications
 - f. None of the above
 - g. Other (please specify)
27. How would you rate ABAC as a State College in the following areas?
- a. Reputation - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor
 - b. Distinctiveness - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very

Poor

- c. Prestige - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor
- d. Quality of Programs - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor
- e. Competitive excellence when compared to other State Colleges - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor
- f. Accomplishments of students - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor
- g. Accomplishments of alumni - Excellent/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Very Poor

28. How well did ABAC prepare you for your chosen career?

- a. Very well prepared
- b. Well prepared
- c. Poorly prepared
- d. Very poorly prepared

29. As an ABAC alumnus, please rate your overall level of satisfaction with your alumni relationship with ABAC:

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied

30. (Optional) Please feel free to comment about your ABAC student experience or your experience as an alumnus of ABAC, or share other thoughts you may have as a result of completing this survey: