

IMPACT THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE HAS ON  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALUMNI LOYALTY

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Doctor of Education

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By

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IMPACT THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE HAS ON  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALUMNI LOYALTY

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## DEDICATION

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# IMPACT THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE HAS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALUMNI LOYALTY

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the undergraduate student experience impacts the development of alumni loyalty, when loyalty forms, and in what ways alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater. Data was collected through thirty semi-structured individual interviews, fifteen donors and fifteen non-donors, and two focus groups. Participants were alumni of a midsized, comprehensive, midwestern institution.

Data indicated that there are some differences between the donor and non-donor groups. Donors tended to have stronger relationships that were maintained over time, believed they had changed while attending the university, and thought their education had provided them a foundation for life. Donors tended to have more than one degree and more than one degree from the same institution. Non-donors were overall positive, but seemed to not have the same investment in the institution, and had to rely more on loans to pay for their education. Views on loyalty were similar across both groups, but donors indicated more of an attachment. Both groups believed that support was making a financial gift to the institution. The focus groups had similar beliefs as the interview participants, however they believed involvement was key to long term engagement, while involvement in both donor groups was consistent.

Findings indicate the relationships formed while a student play an important role in the formation of loyalty and long-term affiliation with the institution. In addition, the alumni's satisfaction with overall student experience impacts both relationships and loyalty.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

The time students spent at their undergraduate institution shaped their experience and perceptions of the institution for years following their time on campus. Graduates who had a rewarding undergraduate experience and believed the university contributed to their success feel more connected to their alma mater, become more engaged, and contribute financially when able (Johnson & Eckel, 1998; Sun, 2005). Conversely, students who had an unsatisfying experience may not stay connected. Attachment to an institution has an impact on motivation to give (Terry & Macy, 2007), and many university personnel fail to realize that today's students are tomorrow's alumni (Jablonski, 1999; Johnson & Eckel). Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy (1999) pose the question: Is there anything institutions can do to nurture and reinforce values that will encourage undergraduates to support their institutions after graduation?

Many administrators focus on the importance of students having a positive experience while working towards their undergraduate degree so they are retained as students at the institution through graduation. This is key for enrollment figures, income and graduation rates. This view is short sighted, however, as the real goal should be to retain students for the rest of their lives. Students' relationship with the institution begins when they first meet with an admissions representative and ends not when they cross the stage at graduation, but when they or the institution are no longer in existence.

“Just as students who are dissatisfied with their college experience leave their institution, college alumni who are dissatisfied with their...experience do

not...participate in alumni programming or give financially” (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003, p. 20). Forming an understanding of the attitudes and relationships alumni have with their alma maters, and when those are formed, would provide insights into potential financial giving and alumni involvement. This understanding would also allow universities to have an intentional impact on factors that occur during the student experience that later lead to alumni loyalty.

The trend in higher education funding has long been on a decline in federal, state, and local government appropriations (Terry & Macy, 2007). Johnson and Eckel (1998) found that many legislatures were cutting budgets and allocating less to higher education; this has continued to be the trend since that time. The economic problems the United States has faced over the past several years have had a profound impact on publically assisted institutions. States struggle to make their budgets balance, and in order to do so, cuts are made to all areas that are state supported, including higher education. It is unlikely that a majority of public colleges and universities will be successful in their attempts to receive substantially greater support from their state government in the future (Schuh, 2009).

As budgets become tighter, there is more pressure than ever before to increase revenues (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). Hooker (2000) stated, “few new sources of revenue will be available beyond private donations and revenue associated with tuition increases” (p. 13). An additional concern is that while state appropriations are decreasing, charitable giving in the United States is also decreasing. In 2008 charitable giving declined by 5.7 percent, or a decrease of \$6.4 billion (Wasley, 2009). This is the first decline in charitable giving since 1987 and the second decline since tracking began in



1956 (Giving USA, 2009). Giving to education decreased by 5.5 percent in 2008, as well. Increased alumni giving and support could assist with generating additional revenue for institutions of higher education. “Alumni generosity can provide more independence and financial flexibility than can tuition and state appropriations” (Volkwein & Parmley, 1999, p. 59). It is more important than ever that institutions need to better understand what creates alumni loyalty so it can be cultivated while they are students in order to increase alumni support (Conner, 2005; Mercatoris, 2006).

An institution’s alumni base is a valuable source of support that if utilized properly can provide a wealth of opportunities for the institution. Alumni already know and understand the university and why it’s special. They just need to understand the institution’s needs, and how they can assist and support. Alumni can offer support in a variety of ways from making financial contributions, recruiting students, participating in alumni functions, mentoring students, volunteering on campus, wearing university-branded products, and seeking additional education (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). The question is, what makes alumni loyal to their undergraduate institution?

The student experience while on campus has a major impact on feelings and opinions toward the institution as alumni (Sun, 2005; Thomas, 2005). Alumni loyalty has been found to be a significant factor in giving (Conner, 2005). Studying the undergraduate experience may provide a glimpse into the source of loyalty for individuals who support their alma mater (Meratoris, 2006). This information could provide data on how institutions might create a sense of ownership for students to their alma mater that would result in future support.

## Statement of the Problem

Nationally, funding to higher education has been on the decline (Johnson & Eckel, 1998; Terry & Macy, 2007). In order to sustain themselves colleges and universities need to find new sources of revenue or capitalize on already existing sources (Hooker, 2000; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). One already existing source of support that university's could benefit from is their alumni. Alumni are already a part of the campus community, understand the institution, and can offer valuable support through their time, treasure and talent. The literature does not indicate what creates loyal alumni and what motivates alumni to support their alma mater.

Most colleges and universities charge Alumni Relations with keeping alumni satisfied, connected to and engaged with their alma mater (Minniear, 2006). These offices go about this process in a variety of ways; from offering alumni events and reunions, to producing alumni publications and offering opportunities for alumni to be involved in the life of the institution. The idea is that by keeping alumni connected, they will feel good about their alma mater and contribute back either through financial gifts or their time and talent. While keeping alumni connected sounds like an uncomplicated task, it is not as straightforward as it sounds. As students, opinions of the institution are formed, and those opinions continue after graduation. If loyalty to the institution is not formed prior to graduation, that bond will probably never be created. "Changing negative opinion is extremely difficult once [the student has] graduated" (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003, p. 21).

University faculty and staff need to take into consideration what variables create alumni loyalty while the students are on campus, and what variables will later contribute to alumni deciding to support their alma mater (Gaier, 2003; Johnson & Eckel, 1998).

Better information is needed about factors occurring while the student is on campus that impact the development of alumni loyalty. Without the "...emotional attachment to the institution students are less likely to be interested in either participating in the alumni organization or contributing as alumni" (Young & Fischer, 1996, p. 18).

Often, institutions take short-sighted views of student retention. The goal is to get the student from admission to graduation, and what can be done to ensure that happens is studied and tracked. However, the true goal should be to retain students and their support for the rest of their lives; to form a connection that will last a lifetime.

It is clear that students who persist through to graduation, and had a positive undergraduate experience, are more willing to support their alma mater later in life (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000). It is not clear what factors during the undergraduate experience impact this. It is important to understand the relationship a student has with the institution so the future relationship can be understood (Hanson, 2000). Little research has been conducted to determine how the relationship is formed.

Alumni Relations staffs are charged with keeping alumni connected to the institution. Alumni staff members are not often involved with campus life or decisions and programs shaping the student experience, which is essential to understand how that experience is shaping later alumni loyalty. In their 1999 study, Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy questioned, "What, if anything, can institutions do to nurture or reinforce the values that will encourage undergraduates to support their institutions either financially or through their volunteer efforts after graduation?" (p. 62). In 2001, McAlexander and Koenig shared that their "analysis reveals that current bonds with the university are

influenced strongly by the institutional relationships students form and the experiences they have while enrolled at the university” (p. 35).

While students are on campus there needs to be a focus on laying the foundation that contributes to the relationship they will have with their alma mater following graduation. Gallo and Husbschman (2003) asserted that the interactions students experience during college play a role in their commitment after graduation. They also found a positive correlation between college experience, retention of students, and alumni participation.

With the current economic downturn, and the continued decrease in funding for public higher education, there needs to be an increase in additional revenue streams and support. One area that could assist in creating additional revenue streams for higher education is increasing alumni giving and support. The overall percentage of alumni making financial contributions to their alma mater is low. Alumni giving is at 11.7 percent nationally, which translates to some schools having a lower percentage of alumni giving than that. It was reported that 2005 marked the fourth consecutive year alumni participation declined (Strout, 2006). The Voluntary Support of Education’s survey findings indicate alumni participation has continued to decline since 2001 (CAE, 2010). There is concern that fewer alumni are inclined to give (Strout). Donations to other causes have increased, with giving to international causes up nearly 13 percent and giving to environmental causes up 7.7 percent (Hall, 2008).

Alumni are important to the continued health and prestige of an institution. They are key to the institution’s continued growth and success. Alumni are an institution’s past, present and future. Alumni support their alma maters through distinction in their careers,

mentoring current students, hiring graduates, speaking in classes, referring prospective students, and providing financial assistance. It is becoming more important than ever to understand what occurs during the student experience that creates alumni loyalty to one's alma mater after graduation. The need to understand this is imperative for institutions of higher education as budgets get tighter. Alumni support is becoming more necessary than ever (Higgins, 2000).

It is clear that “[c]olleges and universities cannot take alumni development for granted, nor can they assume that once students are admitted they no longer need to be cultivated as alumni” (Johnson & Eckel, 1998, p. 230). It is the responsibility of the institution to educate students so that as they “enter an institution, they...realize that they will someday become their alma mater's alumni” (Johnson & Eckel, p. 230). This cannot be done effectively unless institutions understand what occurs during the undergraduate experience to develop alumni loyalty.

Current research related to alumni support is predominantly quantitative, focusing on demographic and undergraduate variables used to predict alumni giving or involvement. Some studies have an open ended question at the end of the survey. Other than a few notable exceptions, there are very few qualitative studies in this area, and the researcher did not find any previous studies on what occurs during the undergraduate experience to create alumni loyalty.

#### Purpose of the Study

Alumni support is an important topic. Many institutions question how they can increase alumni support, but even more important is finding out what motivates alumni to support their undergraduate alma mater. While there are many factors after graduation

that contribute to alumni support, there are just as many, if not more, that occur while a student is still on campus. Studies show that willingness to contribute is affected by undergraduate experiences (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Johnson & Eckel, 1998).

It is important to be aware of factors occurring on campus that impact student views of the institution. As Johnson and Eckel (1998) stated, “one large barrier to overcome in poor alumni relations is rooted in a past experience that cannot be easily changed...it is an uphill battle...when former students associate negative experiences with their alma mater ” (p. 229). This is why it is becoming more and more crucial to know what experiences students are having while they are on campus that could potentially contribute to, or deter, alumni support for their alma mater.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the student experience shapes alumni loyalty, and how alumni loyalty is formed. Little research has been done on this topic. Gaining a better understanding of alumni loyalty would be beneficial in assessing alumni programs, as well as in building partnerships with both academic and student affairs’ staff in an effort to impact the formation of alumni loyalty. Having an understanding of how and when alumni loyalty is formed could allow institutions to have a greater impact on shaping it, which could impact future alumni support.

Several researchers have suggested qualitative research, as well as research that looks at the formation of alumni loyalty and motivation to give to one’s alma mater in order to increase alumni support (Hanson, 2000; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999). It is assumed that a positive attitude towards one’s alma mater is a prerequisite of alumni giving (Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy). How this attitude is nurtured while alumni are students needs to be researched further.

McAlexander and Koenig supported this in their research when they stated, “[t]o those...who seek to build relationships with alumni, questions relating to the nature of relationships, the ways in which they are built, and their long-term implications on loyalty, are critical and neglected areas for research” (p. 23). Hanson suggested that “future research should focus on the formation of alumni donors’ attitudes; including how those attitudes form, when they form and the extent to which post-graduation activities can influence those attitudes” (p. 95). Brittingham and Pezzullo (1990) stated it simply by asking, “[a]re attitudes toward the college relatively set by commencement time?” (p. 89).

Most of the current research on alumni giving and involvement has been through doctoral dissertations and has been quantitative in nature, with a few exceptions. A majority of the qualitative research has been an open ended question at the end of a survey. Overall, a majority of the data are quantitative, addressing characteristics contributing to or predicting alumni giving. Little work has been done to determine what creates alumni loyalty and contributes to alumni motivation to give.

This research will contribute to the body of knowledge already available on alumni support. It will add to the research by exploring the development of alumni loyalty, the reasons alumni choose to support their alma mater and what factors motivate them to do so. This research could allow universities to implement programs designed to impact the development of alumni loyalty while alumni are students, thus possibly increasing future alumni support.

## Research Questions

Multiple factors contribute to the development of alumni loyalty. If these factors are known, they can be used to shape the student experience and increase the likelihood of future alumni giving and involvement. The following questions guide this study:

1. How do alumni define loyalty?
2. How do alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater?
3. What undergraduate experiences impact long-term affiliation or disaffiliation with one's alma mater?
4. At what point does loyalty to one's alma mater form?
5. What impacts the formation of loyalty?
6. What can be done to improve the student experience to increase the chances of loyalty formation?
7. What motivates alumni to support, or inhibits them from supporting, their alma mater?

## Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to consider when reviewing this study. These limitations make it difficult to apply the findings to other institutions' alumni and to alumni from other types of institutions.

Alumni financial contributions were used as a way to determine alumni loyalty in creating focus groups and interviewing participants. Giving is not a complete measure of one's loyalty to his or her alma mater, but for the purpose of defining the research groups, it was used as a preliminary predictor of alumni loyalty.



Only one institution's alumni were studied while conducting this research. The institution is a medium-sized, public, comprehensive midwestern, master's degree level, division II institution. This limits the application of the findings to other institutions, and especially other types of institutions.

Only alumni that completed an undergraduate degree were considered for this research. Non-degreed alumni were excluded, and those who received only a master's degree were also excluded. This limits the ability to apply the findings to all student populations existing on a college campus.

A purposive sample was used for this study. Whenever a researcher's judgment is used in selecting research participants for a study, there is concern about researcher bias. In addition, with qualitative research there is also concern about internal validity and researcher bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

#### Definition of Key Terms

There are several terms used throughout this study for which different definitions may exist or for which additional clarification may be needed to understand the context in which they are used.

*Alma mater:* The institution from which one received his/her undergraduate degree.

*Alumni:* Many institutions define alumni as anyone who ever took a course at the institution. For the purposes of this study, alumni are defined as any undergraduate graduate of the institution who completed all requirements and obtained a degree (Conner, 2005; Enyard, 1993; Gaier, 2003; McNally, 1985; Mercatoris, 2006; Minniear, 2006; Mosser, 1993; Thomas, 2005).

*Alumni involvement:* Alumni who feel included and participate in university activities and engage in some way with the life of the institution. Examples would be holding volunteer positions, attending alumni events or engaging in some other way with the university.

*Alumni loyalty:* The relationship alumni have with their undergraduate institution as illustrated through alumni involvement in the institution after graduation, including wearing the institution's brand, promoting the institution to future students, and giving of their time, talent or treasure. For the purpose of this study there were two interview groups, donor and non-donor.

*Alumni relations:* Functional area responsible for developing and maintaining positive relationships between alumni and the university (Arnold, 2003).

*Annual giving:* Branch of fundraising which deals with annual support from alumni (Enyard, 1993).

*Capacity to give:* A person's financial ability to make a monetary gift.

*College experience:* The activities and interactions occurring during the period of time spent obtaining an undergraduate degree (Gaier, 2003).

*Donor:* Someone that has made a monetary gift to the university in the past year (Conner, 2005; Enyard, 1993; Mercatoris, 2006).

*Motivation to give:* Emotional reasons motivating alumni to be donors.

*Non-degreed alumnus:* Someone who took classes at the university but did not complete a degree.

*Non-donor:* An alumnus that, according to institutional records, has never made a monetary gift to the university (Conner, 2005; Enyard, 1993; Mercatoris, 2006; Van Horn, 2002).

*Support:* Assistance alumni provide to their undergraduate alma mater through either financial contributions or giving of their time and talent, including volunteering with the university, speaking in classes, mentoring students, hiring graduates, or other active engagement with the university to assisting its advancement.

### Summary

Alumni are a significant part of any university community. Loyal alumni play an important role in the life of the institution. Understanding how loyalty is formed is key to shaping loyalty while alumni are students. The benefit of alumni loyalty to institutions is immeasurable. Loyal alumni volunteer, mentor students, hire graduates, recruit students, and make financial contributions. In these current economic times, this support is something institutions cannot ignore.

The literature on current research will be reviewed in the next chapter. Most of the research is quantitative, determining if alumni will contribute financially to the institution or become involved or support their alma mater in another way. Little focus has been given to the development of alumni loyalty, but there is a general feeling that the experience undergraduates have on campus is key to their future alumni support.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Alumni are the past, present and future of all institutions of higher education. They enter as students and leave as alumni. Their years on campus earning their undergraduate degrees are transformational. They grow intellectually, socially and emotionally during that time. The university has a significant impact on the development of each student. The experience shapes his or her future and ultimately determines the degree to which that student later exhibits loyalty to the institution. There has been significant research on alumni giving, but there has been little research conducted about why alumni give. According to the Council for Aide to Education's 2007 Voluntary Support of Education survey, alumni contributed an estimated \$8.27 billion to their alma maters that year (CAE, 2008). In 2009, the survey revealed alumni contributions fell to \$7.13 billion (CAE, 2010). "The value of alumni goes well beyond their total numbers and the sheer amount of dollars they give" (Thompson, 2009, p. 25). While the philanthropic support of alumni is greatly needed, the other support they are able to offer is invaluable as well. Alumni speak in classes, create internships, hire other alumni, promote the institution, serve on boards, and assist as volunteers in a variety of ways. Alumni play a large role in advancing the institution. The question remains, what motivates alumni to give back and continue to support their alma mater after they graduate?

The economic problems facing the United States over the past several years have had a profound impact on publically assisted higher education institutions. States are

struggling to make their budgets balance, and to do so means cuts to all areas supported by the state, including higher education. Habel (2010) stated:

State spending on higher education has already been declining, in terms of the proportion of state budgets spent on public colleges and the proportion of college budgets that come from the state, and generally has not kept pace with enrollment growth and inflation over the past several decades. The recession has only exacerbated the trend. It has been so deep and lasted so long that many fiscal analysts say it could be years, if ever, before state spending on higher education rebounds to anything close to previous levels. (p. 2)

The State of Missouri is no exception. As revenues decrease, state lawmakers must balance the budget. In addition, other legislation and agreements limit a state institution's ability to increase tuition to assist in covering increased operating costs.

Institutions of higher education in the State of Missouri are not permitted to increase tuition higher than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) each year. To decrease the level of cuts in the state budget to higher education for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years, the public university presidents made an agreement with the Governor that tuition would not be increased if state funding to higher education remained steady for the 2009 academic year (Wise Bargain, 2009) and was only cut by \$42 million for the 2010 academic year (Noble & Williams, 2009). While this has limited cuts to higher education, it has also left tuition at the same level it was in 2008, and when the institutions are able to again increase tuition they will not be able to make up the loss, since they can only increase annually based on the CPI.

As budgets become tighter, there is more pressure than ever before to increase revenues (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). As funding to higher education at the federal and state levels continues to decrease, few new sources of revenue exist beyond private donations and revenue associated with tuition increases (Hooker, 2000).

One source of additional support for institutions is its alumni base. Loyal alumni can offer a variety of valuable support from making financial contributions, recruiting students, participating in alumni functions, wearing university-branded products, and seeking additional education (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). The question is, what makes alumni loyal to their undergraduate institution? Thomas and Smart (2005) state:

...experiences while in college, or other influences within the control of the institution, have a direct and significant positive impact on donor status...and donor level. . . institutions would benefit by using all reasonable and educationally sound means to provide students with these particular experiences. (p. 4)

In reality, institutions need to cultivate loyal alumni while they are still students as “an institution of higher education cannot reach its fullest potential without actively engaging its alumni” (Webb, 1993, p. 307).

State funding has decreased substantially over the past 30 years (Schuh, 2009), and over the past several years the economy has struggled, which has had a direct impact on funding to public higher education, as well as philanthropic support. As state appropriations decrease more than ever, alternate funding sources, including philanthropic support, have become a greater priority (Elliott, 2006; McClintock, 2000). “Private funding sources are increasingly the means by which schools deliver programs that were once supported through tuition or state or federal support” (Elliott, p. 6). Even prior to the current economic downturn, public institutions received less and less funding from the state. While public institutions were at one time publicly supported, they are now merely publicly assisted (Elliott).

While the American people continue to support not-for-profit organizations, higher education fundraisers find themselves in competition with other charities (Elliott,

2006). “The competition for philanthropic dollars will not be so much among educational institutions as it will be among other worthy non-profit organizations” (Buchanan, 2000b, p. 68). Generosity from alumni can provide institutions with more independence and financial flexibility than can tuition and state appropriations (Volkwein & Parmley, 1999). It is now more important than ever to determine what makes alumni loyal to their alma mater, and what institutions can do to cultivate that loyalty to ensure future support.

### Higher Education’s Challenge

Colleges and universities never have been agencies of the federal government. Higher education has developed due to private initiative and state government (Worth, 2002c). When state universities were created, their governance structures were based on already existing private institutions (Worth). Regents or trustees were political appointments, insulated from direct control by the state, which allowed them the opportunity to compete with other institutions for students and resources (Worth). This has allowed public education in the United States to be:

[w]idely considered the finest tertiary system of education in the world, it educates more of its citizens than any other nation, welcomes more students from other nations than any other, and produces an extraordinary and continuing array of world class research in virtually every field of intellectual inquiry. . . . educating more than 85 percent of entering undergraduates and 60 percent of graduate students. (Buchanan, 2000a, p. 5)

This set up and structure has allowed public higher education in the United States to flourish, and compete both nationally and internationally.

One global concern is that “[t]he overall costs of obtaining a higher education continues to escalate faster than the cost of living” (Schuh, 2009, p. 81). Amid pressure for tuition to increase to generate needed revenue, students find their dollars spread more

thinly than ever. Private support has become key for many institutions to provide needed programs and scholarships to students. In “[t]he decade of the 1990s...[t]he economy sustained remarkable levels of growth; the country witnessed an unprecedented accumulation of individual wealth; and philanthropic support for education increased at impressive rates” (McClintock, 2000, p. 367). During this time higher education reaped the benefits of a strong economy and generous alumni. Although the amount given to higher education increased substantially, it was from fewer and fewer people. Often, fundraisers and fundraising consultants refer to the 80/20 and the 90/10 theories, which are merely anecdotal, but not validated in the research. In other words, conventional wisdom has held that 80 percent of the money was given by 20 percent of the donor base, or more recently 90 percent of what is given comes from only 10 percent of the donor base. What these theories illustrate is while more money may be donated it is actually coming from fewer and fewer people.

Annually, the Council for the Aid to Education conducts the Voluntary Support of Education study. Their 2009 findings indicated contributions to higher education in the United State had declined 11.9 percent in the past year (CAE, 2010). This decline is the steepest in the survey’s history. This is in stark contrast to the study’s finding over the previous ten years, which showed contributions to higher education increasing an average of 4.1 percent per year (CAE). This illustrates the need to determine what motivates alumni to give, focus on these factors, and increase the number of alumni supporting their alma mater. If the number of alumni giving continues to trend downward, then the resources available to higher education will also continue to decline.



## Historical Overview

“From the beginning the American college was cloaked with a public purpose, with a responsibility to the past and the present and the future” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 177). At one time higher education was a privilege for the wealthy. Over the years, it has become more accessible for anyone wishing to attend. This accessibility has been due to increased funding of state and federal programs, as well as generous support from alumni and friends of institutions of higher education. “In the twentieth century, a bachelor’s degree evolved from being a stepping stone to becoming an entry-level requirement for many careers” (Elliott, 2006, p. 6), making a bachelor’s degree more of a necessity than it was previously. In some respects, higher education has become “a right rather than a privilege” (Elliott, p. 7). The rising cost of higher education, however, threatens to again make higher education solely for those with privilege and wealth (Elliott) unless additional funding sources are tapped, or existing funding sources are better utilized. Alumni are an available resource and should be utilized to their full potential.

Alumni interest in remaining connected to their alma mater was evident historically. In 1643, Harvard alumni began returning to campus to attend commencement and reconnect with old classmates (Worth, 2002c). Alumni associations have been around nearly as long as some institutions of higher education. In 1821, Williams College formed the first formal alumni association, the Society of Alumni (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990), with their primary purpose being “to perpetuate memories and intellectual interests” (Worth, p. 25). While institutions began forming alumni associations in the early 1800s, “systematic alumni fundraising didn’t begin until the late 1880s” (Todd, 2000, p. 271).

It became apparent that if higher education was to prosper, it would need to tap into private funding sources. Following the Civil War “colleges found new means of support among their alumni and among a crop of especially affluent millionaire benefactors” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 189). As much needed alumni support grew, most institutions were in no position to alienate their alumni and looked for ways to continue to grow their support (Rudolph).

“The beginnings of educational fundraising can be found more than 2000 years ago when Plato directed after his death the income from his fields be used to support the Academy” (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990, p. 5). Fundraising to support higher education in the United States goes back to the first university in the colonies, Harvard. Higher education began at Harvard, and so did the realization that there was a need for philanthropic support in order for the institution to survive (Brittingham & Pezzullo; Rudolph, 1990; Worth, 2002c). Those founding Harvard believed they had “a responsibility to the future. They could not leave its shaping to whim, fate, accident, indecision, incompetence or carelessness. . . [in the long run] education would spell the difference between civilization and barbarism” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 6).

“Philanthropy has played a significant role in the growth of American higher education through the years. . . Americans have given liberally to support colleges and universities” (Thomas & Smart, 2005, p. 3). Educational fundraising officially began in the United States in 1641, when three men went from Boston to London to raise money to support Harvard (Worth, 2002c; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). To increase the support needed for Harvard, “in 1644, the New England Confederation for Colonies

recommended each family within the confederation contribute a shilling or a peck of wheat for scholarships” (Brittingham & Pezzullo, p. 6).

Early colleges were often connected with a sponsoring church, and their fundraising reflected the same strategies used by churches. That consisted mainly of passing the plate at meetings and events (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Rudolph, 1990; Worth, 2002c). At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, affluent Americans desired to improve the quality of civilization, and did so by funding and establishing colleges and universities (Elliott, 2006). This support was generally to private institutions, as public institutions did not have as many financial needs.

Before the 1970’s most public colleges and universities had neither the ability nor the need to seek significant private support. As the missions and the roles of public colleges have expanded, so too have their financial needs. These needs have outstripped the ability of state and local governments to respond, forcing these institutions to seek new sources of support. And they have found such source in private philanthropy. (Worth, p. 32)

Fundraising has become no longer an option, but a central activity for the long term success, progress, and even existence, of colleges and universities across the country (Brittingham & Pezzullo; Thomas & Smart, 2005). “The major source of these private funds has been and continues to be the alumni of the particular institutions” (Thomas & Smart, 2005, p. 3). The total number of alumni giving has begun to decrease, with fewer alumni giving more money.

## Student Development Theory

Today's students are tomorrow's alumni (Johnson & Eckel, 1998). A student's time on campus is full of many changes. McAlexander and Koenig (2001) summarize the experience:

While at the university, students often come into contact with people, ideas, and issues that are novel and challenge prior beliefs and values. This time of transition is also a period of experimentation, as students explore alternative self-concepts, behaviors, and lifestyles. In short, the college experience is transformational. (p. 25)

Student development is a holistic, not segmented, process. It is influenced by a variety of experiences across different venues on and off campus (Kuh, 2009b). These events shape the students' experience, and form the connection these students may later have with their alma mater as alumni.

Student development theories are used in the Student Affairs profession to explain student development, and also as tools to assist in developing students. Psychosocial development theories attempt to explain development involving age related tasks, focusing on the resolution of different life challenges. Development of a student is unique and impacts the ways in which individuals relate to others and their environment (Patton & Harper, 2009). Student success theories examine and explain factors and characteristics that impact students being successful in the academic environment. These theories play a role in the student experience, and their application necessarily impacts the development of loyalty.

Arthur Chickering's (1993) theory of identity development is one of the primary theories used in student development. He has conducted extensive research and determined a series of seven stages of development, or vectors, through which students

progress. At each vector, students are presented with a challenge they have to face and successfully resolve to progress to the next vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This does not necessarily occur in sequential order, and students move at different rates and in different orders. The seven vectors are: (a) developing competence; (b) managing emotions; (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence; (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (e) establishing identity; (f) developing purpose; and (g) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). This theory focuses on developing the whole person.

Sanford was one of the first researchers to address the relationship between college environment and student transitions. He initiated the concept of balancing challenge and support (Evans, Forney & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). In it, students must have a level of challenge at which they are not overwhelmed, and enough support to keep them learning and progressing in their development.

Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering supports Sandord's theory of challenge and support (Evans, Forney & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). Students may feel marginal when they are learning new material or are in unfamiliar situations. They need to feel their input is important, and that they are important; that they matter.

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement has been based on research of college students across the country for several decades. Astin asserts that the students' involvement with their environment equals output or development of the student. It identifies and explains the interaction of student resources with environmental factors such as involvement opportunities. The easier it is to become involved in an institution, the easier it will be for students to feel they belong to the community.

“Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience...It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Factors that contributed to student retention in college suggested involvement, whereas those that contributed to the students dropping out implied a lack of involvement. Astin has found that areas of involvement related to retention include living on campus, joining social fraternities or sororities, participating in extracurricular activities, intercollegiate sports, honors programs, ROTC, participating in undergraduate research, and holding a part time job on campus. Holding an off-campus full-time job, however, detracts from retention.

Astin’s (1984) research also revealed that frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement. Milem and Berger’s (1997) findings indicated how important early student involvement is to the development process, and the significant role that faculty relationships play in persistence.

Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy (1999) conducted research on the impact of an intentional student environment on later alumni involvement and giving. For this research they altered Astin’s theory of involvement to include the role of the institution’s commitment to developing the environment to intentionally shape student outcomes. Their research found that schools that invested more time in student outcomes had alumni who were more willing to invest time and money in programs that would benefit the university, and these programs had a potential long-term impact on alumni behavior.

Kuh (1995) looked at out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. He found that specific leadership responsibilities were instrumental in both student learning and personal development. Gains in knowledge and academic skills were associated primarily with academic activities and faculty contact. His findings also indicate that students benefit in many ways from out-of-class experiences, ranging from gains in critical thinking to relational and organizational skills, which contribute to satisfaction and success after college.

Cooper, Healy and Simpson (1994) found evidence to demonstrate that involvement in campus life has direct, positive effects on student learning, both in and out of the classroom. Members of student organizations tended to show more gains in educational involvement, career planning, lifestyles planning, cultural participation, and academic autonomy. “Leadership roles appear to provide the opportunity to sustain and further develop skills” (p. 101). There is evidence that involvement is related to change in students during college.

Engagement plays a key role in all student development theory’s, and impacts the experiences students have while they are on campus. The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) began in 2000, and was created in order to assist colleges and universities in measuring engagement students experience while they are on campus (Kuh, 2000a).

The engagement premise is straightforward and easily understood: the more students study a subject, the more they know about it, and the more students practice and get feedback from faculty and staff members...the deeper they come to understand what they are learning and the more adept they become at managing complexity, tolerating ambiguity, and working with people from different backgrounds or with different views. Engaging in a variety of educationally productive activities also builds the foundation of skills and dispositions people need to live a productive satisfying life after college. (Kuh, 2000a)

Findings from NSSE indicated that engagement is key in retaining under-prepared students, and under-represented students, and encouraging higher student participation (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2009).

Student loyalty is a key objective for many higher education institutions (Henning-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001), as it is key not only to retaining students to graduation, but also to continued support following graduation. Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hanson conducted a study on student loyalty and found that the advantages of student loyalty are not limited to the time that the student spends on campus, but are in fact, the greatest after the student graduates. A former student's loyalty can be expected to be predominantly based on his or her experiences while at the university. Both academic and social integration have a positive impact on emotional commitment to the institution both while a student and following graduation. Students' emotional commitment is a significant determinant of loyalty, and Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen's findings demonstrate that commitment largely depends on the depth of the student's academic integration. It is clear that a students' interest in non-university activities works against high emotional commitment.

“Students are alumni in transition and the road to active and involved alumni must be cultivated throughout a student's years on campus” (Stutler & Calvario, 1996, p. 2). Colleges have an opportunity to increase their perceived impact on the social and personal development of students (Graham & Cockriel, 1997), and, therefore, the likelihood of support from that student as an alumnus.



## Undergraduate Experience

Based on the existing research, the undergraduate experience clearly plays a substantial role in the creation of alumni loyalty. The relationship that alumni have with the university begins with their experience as students. Satisfaction with the student experience plays an intricate role in the development of alumni loyalty and cultivation of future support to the institution (Pearson, 1999). There has been much quantitative research on using the undergraduate experience to predict alumni giving, including overall satisfaction with their undergraduate experience, receipt of a scholarship, grade point average, academic success, interactions with faculty and staff, and extracurricular activities. Little to no qualitative research has been conducted in these areas.

### *Academic and Overall Satisfaction*

Whether or not alumni are satisfied overall with their undergraduate academic experience influences post graduation connections to their alma mater and future giving (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2001; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Gaier, 2003; Gallo & Hubschman, 2003; Hoyt, 2004; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Monks, 2003; Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario, 1996; Sun 2005; Van Horn, 2002). The academic experience plays a role in overall satisfaction with the undergraduate experience. Alumni perceptions of the strength of academic programs influence perception of their experience in and out of the classroom (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003). Coursework, quality of instruction and overall level of satisfaction with undergraduate academic experience were variables that had the highest correlation for alumni giving (Gaier, 2003). Satisfaction was greater with the student experience, and giving was also impacted, when students

believe they had educational gains (Conner, 2005) and that the university contributed to those gains (Sun, 2005).

A study at Stanford indicated that “satisfaction was greatest among alumni who are most satisfied with the advising they received, who feel the university made them aware of the best classes and academic opportunities, and who were most challenged (academically and intellectually) by their undergraduate programs” (Pearson, 1999, p. 8). Alumni who believe they received high-quality instruction and reported a greater level of learning are more likely to have higher overall satisfaction, and more likely to support the institution (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2001; Hoyt; 2004; Utter, Noble & Brady, 1999). “Those who are very satisfied perceive the value of their...education to be greater, take greater pride in their...degree, have a stronger personal commitment to [their institution], and are more likely to be donors” (Pearson, p. 8). Students who took longer to graduate are less likely to give (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000).

Miller and Casebeer (1990) found that respondents who were involved in campus life reported higher satisfaction and academic performance than those who were not involved. Ridley and Boone (2001) determined that the “number of activities a student engaged in is positively correlated with student satisfaction” (p. 11). Interestingly, they also found, “the more activities students were involved in, the fewer friendships that were maintained over time” (p. 11). Alumni that are not satisfied with their undergraduate experience are generally non-donors (Pearson, 1999; Clotfelter, 2001).

#### *Student Ability and Academic Success*

Students who experience undergraduate academic success are more likely to financially support their alma mater (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Conner, 2005; Dugan,

Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Sun (2005) asserts that the academic environment has a significant impact on alumni donations. Conner states that “educational gains...had the highest total impact on alumni giving...” (p. 78). Alumni give because they believe they received a high-quality education (Baade & Sundberg; Boyle, 1992). Ridley and Boone (2001) found that the perceived value and quality of education suffers when there was a lack of needed courses offered during alumni time on campus.

Undergraduate grade point average can be used as a limited measure of a student’s academic success, and has been studied to varied results to determine its impact on alumni giving and involvement. Alumni who are donors are more likely to have a cumulative grade point average in the “A” range (Hoyt, 2004). Dugan, Mullin and Siegfried (2000) “found cumulative GPA has a negative impact...on average gift size” (p. 14). However, Belanger (1999) and Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy (1999) found GPA is a poor predictor, and does not impact alumni giving. Alumni who graduated with honors are less inclined to give than those that did not receive honors (Okunade, Wunnava & Walsh, 1994), but those that do give tend to contribute at higher levels (Belfield & Beney, 2000; Clotfelter, 2001).

#### *Scholarship and Financial Aid*

Several researchers have investigated whether receipt of a scholarship or other financial aid has a bearing on later alumni generosity (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2003; Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002; Dugan, Mullins & Siegfried, 2000; Enyard, 1993; Hanson, 2000; Hoyt, 2004; Monks, 2003). Baade and Sundberg found that students who get through college without taking out loans are more likely to give. Some

findings indicate, however, that recipients of financial aid are more likely to give than those who do not receive aid (Hanson; Monks).

It appears that not all types of financial aid have a positive impact on giving. Monk (2003) found that loans have a negative effect. Those who received need-based aid are more likely to give (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002), but they tend to give less (Clotfelter, 2003). Dugan, Mullin and Siegfried (2000), however, contradict this conclusion in their study in which they found “no evidence that recipients of need-based aid nor the amount of that aid affects the size of contributors’ gifts” (p. 14). Interestingly, they also found that those who receive moderate merit awards give, while those who receive large merit awards do not tend to give.

Institutional scholarship recipients are more likely to give (Enyard, 1993). There seems to be reciprocity with alumni who had received institutional scholarships, but not with those that received Pell grants (Enyard). Cunningham and Cochi-Ficano (2002) found non-need based scholarships do not have an impact on alumni contributions. However, Hoyt (2004) discovered that “receipt of a scholarship creates a desire on the part of the alumni to give others students the same opportunity” (p. 14). It appears that “the types of financial aid received [are] more important than the quantity given” (Dugan, Mullins and Segfried, 2000, p. 15).

#### *Interactions with Faculty and Staff*

“Alumni had many opportunities for formative interactions with university representatives during their experience as students. These interactions range from the incidental exchanges that might occur at the library with a librarian to the intimate community that can exist in classrooms with faculty” (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001, p.

25). Following graduation approximately one third of alumni maintain contact with university personnel (Hoyt, 2004). These post-graduation interactions further shape alumni attitudes towards the institution (McAlexander & Koenig).

Overall satisfaction with one's alma mater "most notably was the memory of at least one person associated with the institution who took an interest in [them while they were students]" (Clotfelter, 2003, p. 118) and continued interest in them after they graduated (Boyle, 1992). A low ratio of students to faculty is found to correlate to voluntary giving from former students (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002). Students who experience high faculty interaction through independent study and conducting research, however, seem less likely to provide alumni support (Monks, 2003).

#### *Student Involvement and Extracurricular Activities*

Involvement in extracurricular activities is an important part of the undergraduate experience. Several researchers have studied the impact that student involvement and involvement in extracurricular activities has on future alumni involvement and giving (Balanger, 1999; Clotfelter, 2001; Conner, 2005; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Gaier, 2003; Gallo & Hausbschman, 2003; Hoyt, 2004; McNally, 1985; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Monks, 2003; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999; Ridley & Boone, 2001; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Thomas & Smart, 2005; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001; Young & Fischer, 1996). Gaier found that "alumni giving based on participation in student activities was found to be significant...odds of alumni giving increases 87 percent in alumni who have participated in extracurricular activities during their undergraduate experience in comparison with those alumni who did not participate..." (p. 54).

Several researchers found that student involvement could be used to discriminate between donor and non-donor groups (Hoyt, 2004; McNally, 1985; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Thomas & Smart, 2005), and level of giving (Monks, 2003; Taylor & Martin). Involvement was an area of difference between donors and better donors (Thomas & Smart), and between occasional and consistent donors (Wunnava, 2001). Greater involvement was an indicator of a greater likelihood to contribute financially (Thomas & Smart).

Types of involvement also seemed to impact alumni giving. Alumni who were involved in academic clubs or organizations on average gave less (Monks, 2003; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Participation in Greek life, student government, intercollegiate athletics, performing arts, religious groups, or residence hall life are all correlated with greater levels of alumni giving (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Monk; Taylor & Martin). Alumni that had held a leadership position in an extracurricular activity give more than those who did not (Clotfelter, 2001).

Findings indicate that students who are involved in extracurricular activities have a higher likelihood of being involved with the university after graduation and participating in the alumni association (Gallo & Husbschman, 2003; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999; Young & Fischer, 1996). Some undergraduate predictors of alumni involvement include having participated in intramural sports and student government (Young & Fischer), as well as involvement in a sorority or fraternity (Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy).

## Impact of Alumni Loyalty

Understanding what shapes alumni loyalty can have significant implications for all institutions of higher education. Alumni loyalty begins being formed the moment a student considers attending an institution, and perhaps even earlier. Many “administrators [are] interested in understanding the actual changes that occur in college, [and] they also want to determine the types of activities that will have the most beneficial effect on students” (Graham & Cockriel, 1997, p. 200). Often administrators focus on student persistence to graduation. A student may persevere at an institution for a variety of reasons, but that does not mean that the student will be a loyal alumnus after graduation. “No college or university should believe that just because students enroll and graduate from their institution, these same graduates automatically become active alumni” (Johnson & Eckel, 1998, p. 228).

Experiences that students have while they are on campus are correlated with their feelings toward the institution after graduation. Alumni who have positive feelings toward the institution may feel more connected, become involved, and provide support to their alma mater (Johnson & Eckel, 1998). Students who had an unsatisfying experience may have negative feelings towards the university, and may not assist their institutions when possible (Johnson & Eckel). “Dissatisfied alumni are lost opportunities for institutional gain, similar to the dissatisfied customers who no longer patronize a store” (Johnson & Eckel, p. 229). Alumni loyalty is built when alumni are students. There is little that can be done to develop a bond between a student and the institution if there is not one there prior to graduation.

Loyal alumni contribute to and support their institutions in a variety of ways. Alumni support is a rich resource that provides opportunities that could not be found from any other group. Johnson and Eckel (1998) noted that:

in addition to financial gifts, alumni assist...notably through their time, energy and effort. Many alumni are active ambassadors for their institutions, serving as alumni volunteers and lobbyists, acting as mentors to undergraduates, cheering on athletic teams, attending events and sitting on institutional boards. (p. 228)

Without alumni support, institutions would be missing a crucial piece to their continued success. While alumni assist the institution, they also continue to bring honor to the institution through their accomplishments and successes, which work in turn to increase the prestige of the institution.

Alumni emotional commitment to their alma mater impacts their donor behavior and support. Research needs to be conducted on how and when those attitudes form (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989). Having an understanding of what motivates alumni to support higher education, and being able to determine who is emotionally connected to the institution and why, are key to successful fundraising efforts (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). Understanding how these attitudes are formed can allow institutions to potentially impact the formation of those attitudes as “changing a negative opinion is difficult once the student has graduated” (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003, p. 21).

#### Alumni Research

“Research reveals the powerful influence of relationships on every facet of loyalty” (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001, p. 37). This loyalty is established when alumni are students, forming opinions and impressions while they are on campus which influence support and engagement to their alma mater (Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario,



1996). Alumni loyalty is the most significant factor in determining alumni support (Conner, 2005). When alumni make the decision to support their alma mater it exhibits the high affinity they have for the institution (Stutler & Calvario).

“It has been in the last 15 years that fundraising has moved beyond principles supported solely by anecdotal evidence to begin building a body of knowledge based on theory and research” (Kelly, 2002, p. 39). A majority of the research has been related to alumni giving behavior, and an attempt to utilize characteristics that can predict alumni giving and involvement. Critics have “described fundraising research as sporadic, fragmented, redundant, and disappointing” (Kelly, p. 42). Developing an understanding of what motivates alumni to give, related behavior and related factors would allow institutions to increase revenue significantly (Thomas & Smart).

In 2001, an alumni study was conducted at Virginia Wesleyan College to enhance alumni loyalty (Ridley & Boone, 2001). The study defined loyal alumni as “a graduate who readily acknowledges the unique contributions [their institution played] in his/her personal and professional growth and one who has maintained an active interest in the college” (Ridley & Boone, p. 2). The study determined several traits that loyal alumni would exhibit. While there is more than one way for alumni to exhibit their loyalty, Ridley and Boone (2001) found that both factors that occurred while an alumnus was a student and factors following graduation had an impact on loyalty. Their findings indicated that the farther away graduates live from the institution, the lower the perceived quality of their degree. The perceived value and quality of education drop when needed courses were not available. They also found that older graduates give more. The number

of activities a student engaged in contributes to student satisfaction, but the more activities students were involved in, the fewer friendships they maintain over time.

Alumni who support their alma mater recognize the emotional attachment they have with the institution and the role it played in their life (Belanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Mosser, 1993; Taylor & Martin, 1995). This attachment is attributed to alumni satisfaction with their undergraduate experience. Students who were satisfied and felt invested in the institution are more likely to give back to their alma mater (Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario, 1996; Utter, Noble & Brady, 1999).

Clotfelter (2003) found two factors of importance for alumni giving including “income and an overall good opinion of one’s alma mater” (p. 118). Overall satisfaction with one’s alma mater was associated with one person who took an interest in them while they were a student, and identifying with the institution on a personal level (Clotfelter; Hanson, 2000). Approximately one third of alumni maintain contact with someone on campus after they have left (Hoyt, 2004).

Alumni exhibit additional expressions of loyalty by wanting their children to attend the same university and wearing university logo clothing. Both are influenced by the present relationships alumni have with the college, their student experience, and the level of academic challenge they encountered (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001).

### Alumni Giving

According to Elliott (2006), alumni are motivated to give money for a combination of seven basic reasons: (a) religious, spiritual or philosophical beliefs; (b) guilt; (c) recognition; (d) self-preservation and fear; (e) tax rewards; (f) obligation; and (g)

pride and self respect. Those motivated by recognition, tax rewards, obligation and pride are likely to look to their alma maters for philanthropic outlet. Brittingham and Pezzullo (1990) assert that:

private giving may be partly explained by such motives as buying acclaim and friendship, yielding to general egoistic desires, assuaging feelings of guilt, maximizing profits, repaying advantages received (such as college alumni might wish to do), investing in activities that have indirect utility to the donor...or receiving the tangible perquisites of private giving. (p. 34)

Gift exchange theory suggests that institutions provided alumni with several advantages in life including their education and the start to their career. Institutions then ask their grateful alumni to give time, energy, leadership, and emotional support back to the institution (Brittingham & Pezzullo).

“Alumni giving...remains a source of income that has not been fully developed or understood” (Taylor & Martin, 1995, p. 284). Alumni giving has dropped from its high of 18.7 percent in 1990 to today’s level of 11.7 percent alumni participation for all colleges and universities (Thompson, 2009). There is a high variation in alumni giving rates between types of institutions. Participation of alumni giving at private institutions tends to be higher than at public institutions.

According to the Council for the Advancement of Education, alumni contributions to the nation’s colleges and universities reached \$31.6 billion in 2008, growing 6.2 percent (CAE, 2009). In 2009, charitable contributions to higher education dropped 11.9 percent (CAE, 2010). Since 2000, the average annual increase in contributions to higher education institutions has been 4.1 percent (CAE). “Alumni participation declined from 11.7 percent to 11 percent, a decline caused by a 5.3 percent increase in the number of alumni of record and only a one percent increase in the number

of alumni donors” (CAE, p. 4). In the current economic climate, alumni donations and participation are dropping. Some of this is due to improved data tracking methods and being able to contact more alumni. Unfortunately, not all of the alumni participation decline can be attributed to that.

“Records of alumni giving date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century” (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990, p. 8), although until the 20th century, they were not a major funding source. In the 1870’s and 1880’s, educational leaders were concerned that alumni were not supporting their alma mater as a way of thanks for the advantages the institution had provided them (Curti & Nash, 1965). Until World War I, alumni giving was minimal, but after 1918 organized alumni support began to grow. With the increased effectiveness of alumni organizations, alumni became more involved with their alma maters (Curti & Nash). Alumni organizations began to play an increased role in philanthropic support to the institution, with alumni funds beginning to be established (Brittingham & Pezzullo; Curti & Nash). “The oldest alumni fund was established at Yale in 1890, and with just under 400 alumni participating raised \$11,000... In 1905, Harvard’s alumni raised \$2.5 million to augment faculty salaries and the liberal arts” (Brittingham & Pezzullo, p. 8).

#### *Alumni Giving Versus Non-Giving*

Many researchers have studied what leads to alumni giving and non-giving behavior (Balanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Gaier, 2003; Hanson, 2000; Heckman & Guskey, 1998; Hoyt, 2004; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; McNally, 1985; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999; O’Connor 1961; Pearson, 1999; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Thomas, 2005; Van Horn, 2002). Pearson asserted that:

alumni are more likely to be donors if they are very satisfied with their student experiences, if they are involved and engage as alumni with the

university, and if they are kept informed about what is happening [on campus]...the stronger the relationship, the more likely they are to be donors. (p. 7)

Belanger found that there is a moderate ability to predict repeat giving for those contributing over \$1,000, with a few key variables, which included academic college, number of years between graduation and making the first gift, desire for tax deduction, amount given, marital status, and other charitable giving. “Variables positively associated with willingness to give are age, capacity to give, receipt of scholarship of \$1000 or more, perceived need, and alumni involvement” (Hoyt, p. 17).

In 1961, O’Conner found five characteristics that affect alumni giving or non-giving; (a) communication with the alma mater, (b) one’s sense of humanitarianism; (c) feelings about the institution; (d) personal attention; and (e) underlying feelings. Since that time, research on alumni characteristics and giving has been the topic of many dissertations. Several additional studies have been conducted that consider donor and non-donor characteristics (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Gaier, 2003; Hanson, 2000; McNally 1985; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Taylor and Martin identified variables that could be used to determine differences between donors and non-donors that include perceived need and enrollment in graduate work. McNally, as well as Taylor and Martin, found that those involved in special interest groups while students, those involved with the institution following graduation, and those with higher incomes were more likely to make financial contributions. Hanson found five possible variables that affect an alumnus’ decision to donate to an institution, including organizational prestige, respect of alumni leaders, perceived financial need, felt reciprocity, and self identification. Overall, “alumni donors tend to be wealthier, be middle-aged or older, have strong emotional ties to their

alma maters, have earned at least a bachelor's degree, [and] participate in some alumni activities..." (Brittingham & Pezzullo, p. iv).

Thomas (2005) conducted a study on how college experiences influence the decision of alumni to contribute financially. Both collegiate extracurricular activities and the college's contribution to personal and social development were examined as they related to donor status and donor level. His findings indicate that donors participated in a higher number of social activities, with campus leadership related to lifetime giving levels. Wunnava and Lauze (2001) looked at the characteristics of consistent donors as compared to occasional donors and found that consistent donors give higher amounts.

Gaier (2003) conducted research on factors which influence alumni to contribute financially to their alma mater and found that there is a positive relationship between alumni satisfaction with the academic system as an undergraduate and current alumni involvement. Heckman and Guskey (1998) found that "both past and future contributors are characterized by higher levels of participation in university sponsored social activities, feeling better informed about the university, and reading university publications more thoroughly" (p. 102). Some troubling research by Belfield and Beney (2000) indicated that "around one-third of all graduates seem set against giving, and around two-thirds are, or at least appear to be, sympathetic but unwilling to donate" (p. 69).

### *Inclination and Capacity*

"Donor behavior is viewed as a function of motivation and capacity" (p. 60), and motivation is instilled during the collegiate experience of alumni (Volkwein & Parmley, 1999). Several researchers have studied the impact of inclination and capacity on giving, and suggest that capacity and motivation do impact gift giving behavior (Gallo &

Husbschman, 2003; Leslie, Drachman, Conrad & Ramey, 1983; Minniear, 2006; Mosser, 1993; Patton, 1986; Volkwein & Parmely). Volkwein and Parmley defined motivation as “emotional attachment to one’s alma mater, memories of positive college experiences, and concern for the future well-being of the institution” (p. 60). They defined capacity as “one’s financial status and how much an alumnus is willing to give” (p. 60).

Generally, capacity comes into play only when motivation is high (Mosser, 1993). The higher the motivation, the higher the gift revenue (Patton, 1986). Patton found that capacity is more influential than motivation, but Leslie, Drachman, Conrad, and Ramey (1983) asserted that giving was generally for personal rather than financial reasons. A sense of belonging, or fit, with the institution as a student, had a positive impact on both motivation and capacity to give (Gallo & Hausbchman, 2003; Volkwein & Parmley, 1999).

#### *Other Motivations to Give*

Some studies found that alumni giving is influenced by perceived need and the institution’s current financial condition (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Conrad & Ramey, 1983; Hanson, 2000; Hoyt, 2004; Leslie, Drachman, Taylor & Martin, 1995). Alumni are more likely to give when they perceive that there is a financial need (Leslie, Drachman, Conrad & Ramey; Taylor & Martin). Perceived need for financial support is a variable that could be used to discriminate between donor and non-donors, as well as between high and low donors (Brittingham & Pezzullo; Hanson; Taylor & Martin). Alumni who perceive that the college needs their donations and has a worthy cause are more likely to give, although a “large majority of alumni are less likely to give during a recession, with current donors less influenced by this factor” (Hoyt, p. 15).

In 1985, McNally questioned if the reason that fewer alumni are giving each year was a result of not being asked, or not having been asked in a convincing manner. Minniear (2006) stated that “being asked was the strongest predictor of whether or not an individual donated to their alma mater” (p. 133). One of the primary reasons alumni gave for not giving is that they have never been asked to give (Hoyt, 2004). Primary reasons that alumni give for making financial contributions is “a sense of obligation or desire to give back to the college” (Hoyt, p. 15).

### Alumni Involvement

There are many ways that alumni can remain involved in their alma mater. They can attend alumni events, speak in classes, serve on university or alumni association committees, assist with admissions, offer internships, and support numerous other areas. Several researchers have studied the impact alumni involvement has on giving and found it to have a positive correlation (Belanger, 1999; Collins, Hecht & Strange, 1999; Gallo & Husbschman, 2003; McNally, 1985; Minniear, 2006; Pearson, 1999; Strange, 2002; Sun, 2005; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Young & Fischer, 1996). Involved alumni are more likely to be donors, are more likely to be repeat donors, with size of the gift strongly related to involvement (Gallo & Husbschman; Strange). One contradiction to these findings is a study by Collins, Hecht and Strange at MIT in which they “discovered that involved alumni were no more likely to give than the general alumni body” (p. 39).

McNally (1985) found that those who were likely to give were also more likely to be involved in the alumni association. This would suggest that those that are involved are already predisposed to give. Minniear’s (2006) results “suggest that it is critically important to keep involved students involved as alumni. If not, they are not as likely to be



donors” (p. 140). Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy (1999) found several characteristics that increase the odds of becoming involved in the alumni association, which include being a woman, being involved in student extracurricular groups, being a member of a sorority or fraternity and having a higher grade point average.

Communicating effectively with alumni is crucial to keeping alumni connected and involved. Alumni who are more informed understand the needs of the institution (Pearson, 1999; Sun, 2005). Giving is influenced by reading institutional communications, such as the alumni magazine or newsletters, and is a key way that alumni stay connected (Pearson; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Heckman and Guskey (1998) discovered that “both past and future contributors are characterized by higher levels of participation in university sponsored social activities, feeling better informed about the university, and reading university publications more thoroughly” (p. 102).

Participation in alumni events is a good predictor of alumni giving (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Collins, Hecht and Strange (1999) found that attendance at events showed a higher chance of alumni giving than volunteer involvement, “suggesting that some volunteers may give time and not money” (p. 39). Donors tended to attend a higher number of university-sponsored social activities (Heckman & Guskey, 1998; Thomas, 2005), and social activities were shown to be related to lifetime giving amounts (Thomas, 2005).

### Demographic Variables

Several demographic factors (age, years since graduation, gender, marital status, number of children, education, occupation, income and location of residence to campus) are often used in looking at alumni giving and involvement. Despite the substantial

research conducted in this area, Brittingham and Pezzullo (1990) assert that “simple demographic variables prove poor predictors” (p. 40).

### *Age*

Findings on age as a predictor of giving seem to be mixed. Most findings indicate that people give more as they age (Belfield & Beney, 2000; Belanger, 1999; Bristol, 1990; Sun, 2005; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001;). Some research indicates that age has a negative effect on capacity to give (Mosser, 1993). Bristol found that the percentage of donors within a class increased as alumni grew older, with spikes at key reunion times. Age it seems, is only a positive predictor for so long. Several studies have indicated that as donors get older, giving will eventually level off or begin to decline (Belfield & Beney; Bristol; Okunade, Wunnava & Walsh, 1994; Wunnava & Lauze). Okunade, Wunnava, and Walsh found that the growth rate to alumni donations decline after age 51. Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that giving of consistent donors remains positive until about the age of 82, and then the giving level begins to level off and decline. Occasional donor giving remains positive until age 60, and little is given after retirement age. Belfield and Beney (2000) had similar findings that the rate of growth of giving reaches a plateau between approximately 61 and 66 years of age.

### *Years Since Graduation*

Several researchers have findings related to years since graduation and giving (Bristol, 1990; Connolly & Blanchette, 1986; Hanson 2000; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Monks, 2003; Ridley & Boone, 2001; Sun, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Thomas & Smart, 2005; Willemain, Goal, Van Deven & Thukal, 1994; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). Connolly and Blanchette asserted that gift giving should increase steadily after graduation until

some point in time, when it would plateau and then steadily decline. Other findings indicate that over the first 50 years the average donation per donor increases (Willemain, Goal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994).

Older classes seem to have the best participation rates (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Willemain, Goal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994) and give more (Ridley & Boone, 2001). Bristol's (1991) findings indicate that alumni who have been out of school for 25 years are more likely to give than those that have only been out for 10 years. Young alumni are giving less, or not at all (Monks, 2003; Willemain, Goal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994). Thomas and Smart (2005) assert that this could be due to the fact that alumni who are further removed from graduation have had more solicitations and more opportunities to give, as well as having a longer amount of time to achieve higher income and greater savings than more recent graduates. Reunions also seem to increase donations (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001; Bristol, 1991; Willemain, Goal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994).

### *Gender*

Gender has been looked at in many research studies as a demographic predictor of giving (Belanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990, 1989; Clotfelter, 2001; Gaier, 2003; McNally, 1985; Monks, 2003; Mosser, 1993; Mulugetta, Nash & Muphy, 1999; Okunade, Wunnava & Walsh, 1994; Thomas, 2005; Young & Fischer, 1996). The findings are mixed. Some research indicates that gender does not have an impact on giving (Belanger; Brittingham & Pezzullo; Clotfelter; Okunade, Wunnava & Walsh). Other findings indicate that gender does make a difference, but these findings often contradict each other. Some research suggests that men are more likely to give than women (Gaier; McNally; Young & Fischer). Gaier asserted that "the

probability of women alumni giving to the university was 25 percent less likely than the probability of men” (p. 78). Yet, others found that females are more likely to give (Belfield & Beney; Brittingham & Pezzullo; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy). Brittingham and Pezzullo asserted that female donors are more generous than male donors. Still other research suggests that male donor’s gifts are larger than female donors gifts (Belfield & Beney; Clotfelter).

### *Marital Status*

There seems to be mixed findings on marital status and its impact on predicting giving. Some researchers found marital status to be a poor predictor of alumni giving (Belanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). Hanson (2000) found that unmarried alumni are more likely to give. However, Dugan, Mullin and Siegfried (2000) found that “married graduates are about four percent more likely to contribute and this number increases to about six percent if their spouse is also...an alumnus” (p. 16). People more disposed to give are married with children (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989). Belfield and Beney found that “those who are married have a lower probability of giving and give less than graduates who are single [and] this even applies to those who are married with a spouse from the same university” (p. 75). Thomas (2005) and Young and Fischer (1996) found that whether or not the spouse was an alumnus of the same institution could be a predictor. Thomas and Smart (2005) found this to have a significant relationship with lifetime donation amount.

The amount given based on marital status has also been studied, but again with mixed findings. Some findings indicate that those that are married give more than single people (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). Still other studies indicate that

married individuals donate significantly less than graduates who are single (Monk, 2003; Belfield & Beney, 2000).

#### *Number of Children*

Interestingly, several studies indicate that alumni with children give more than alumni without children (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Mosser, 1993; Hanson, 2000; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000). Dugan, Mullin and Siegfried (2000) found that alumni with children are more likely to give, and with each child the amount increased. Belanger (1999), however, found that having children is a poor predictor of alumni giving.

#### *Additional Education*

Some research indicates that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to give (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989). A strong predictor of alumni giving is receiving more than one degree from the same institution (Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). Taylor and Martin (1995) found that enrollment in graduate work could be used to discriminate between donors and non-donors, as well as high level donors and low level donors.

#### *Occupation*

Alumni satisfied with their career preparation were more likely to give (Heckman & Guskey, 1998; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Heckman and Guskey determined that the:

perceived effectiveness of the university's career preparation was an important characteristic of both past and intended contributors. ...Alumni assessed the performance of the university by the placement on a first job and the success of graduates in achieving career goals. ...Alumni who felt that the university helped them succeed were more likely to have contributed and to contribute in the future. (p. 108)

Overall, occupation is not a reliable predictor of giving (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). However, looking at those in higher income careers could assist in determining higher level donors (Belanger).

### *Income*

Income level is found to have an impact on determining donors and non-donors and the amount that donors give (Belanger, 1999; Belfiely & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Clotfelter, 2001; Hoyt, 2004; McNally, 1985; Minniear, 2006; Monks, 2003; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999; Taylor & Martin, 1995; Young & Fischer, 1996). Belfield and Beney found that income has a bigger effect on the amount given rather than giving in general. Monks found that “an increase in individual income of \$10,000 raises expected contributions by approximately 2 percent” (p. 124). Having an income of less than \$20,000, however, reduces the probability of being a donor at all (Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy).

### *Distance from Campus*

The distance that alumni live from their alma mater appears to be a demographic factor in giving (Conner, 2005; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Gaier, 2003; Hanson, 2000; Miller & Casebeer, 1990). There are differences, however, in the findings about how distance is predictive of giving. Hanson found that alumni who live out of state are more likely to give, while other research (Ridley & Boone, 2001; Gaier; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried) found that the farther away a graduate lives the lower the ability to predict giving. Gaier found that those living in the same state as the university are more likely to give. Miller and Casebeer found that alumni who tend to support the institution financially live in a 100-mile radius of campus.

### *Family Attendance*

Students who have other family members who attended the same institution, such as parents and grandparents, may have a stronger connection to the institution. Research suggests that alumni who had other relatives whom attended the university are more likely to give (Clotfelter, 2001; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001), and tend to make larger gifts (Clotfelter).

### *Role of University Offices*

Every part of, and every person at, a university plays a role in the experiences a student has while he or she are on campus. That experience impacts how they view the campus as a student, and later as alumni (Johnson & Eckel, 1998). Many institutions are generally comprised of four key areas, all of which impact both the student and alumni experience. Each area is critical to the formation of loyalty to the institution and maintaining that loyalty after graduation. The four areas consist of: (a) academic affairs which focuses on the academic experience, the time students spend in the structured learning environment; (b) administration and finance, which manages the budget, tuition, fees and the physical environment on the campus; (c) student affairs which focuses on the student experience, the time spent outside the classroom; and (d) university advancement which is concerned with the alumni experience, and keeping alumni connected to the institution. All four should work together to accomplish their respective goals.

### *Academic Affairs*

The division of academic affairs is pivotal to the reason students even attend the institution. Students are on campus to earn a degree, and in many cases probably selected the institution for a particular degree program. Faculty teach, mentor and advise students

during their time on campus, and these relationships even continue once the student has graduated (Clotfelter, 2003; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). How satisfied students are with their academic experience is directly related to the faculty with whom they interact (Astin, 1984). Academic affairs is also comprised of other areas outside of the classroom (registrar's office and academic advising) that have an impact on the student's overall experience.

#### *Administration and Finance*

The Division of Administration and Finance is concerned with the financial and physical well being of the institution. This division is made up of areas (accounting services, budget and planning, facilities and operations, human resources, public safety, student financial services) that focus on the business, facilities and safety of the institution. Student interaction with this area is ongoing, and the impact this area has on the student experience is significant. Students utilize this area for parking, campus employment, and paying their tuition and fees.

#### *Student Affairs*

Student affairs is made up of many areas (health services, counseling services, housing and residence life, dining services, career services, campus activities, student involvement, Greek life, diversity, and disability offices) that are focused on working with students to provide them the resources to be successful students as well as grow and develop while they are on campus (Nuss, 1996). The student affairs' focus is on the experience outside of the classroom. It looks to what students are doing when they are not in class and what they need to be successful in the classroom.



### *University Advancement*

University advancement is made up of a variety of areas (alumni relations, marketing, public relations, fundraising, and government relations) with the focus on developing an understanding of support from constituents to secure more resources for the institution (Worth, 2002a). This area's work touches all constituents that would have an interest in the university, including prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, and donors. The two areas that work predominantly with alumni are alumni relations and fundraising. Both are concerned with developing relationships with the institution's alumni.

Alumni relation's role is to maintain a connection with the institution's alumni and provide opportunities to keep alumni engaged in the life of the university. A variety of programs and opportunities are provided to keep alumni connected and informed (Brittingham, 2000). Regional and affinity events and reunions are organized to connect alumni to areas they were involved in when they were on campus or near where they live now. Alumni magazines and newsletters are produced regularly to keep alumni informed about what is occurring on campus. Volunteer opportunities are provided to alumni in a variety of areas, such as speaking in classes, mentoring students, assisting with the admissions process, meeting with legislators, and serving on boards and committees (Jablonski, 1999).

Fundraising, or development as it is often referred to, focuses on raising financial resources for the institution. Within development there are different fundraising focuses, including annual giving and major gifts. Annual giving focuses on providing alumni with the opportunity to support their alma mater on an annual, or ongoing, basis (Schroeder,

2000). Annual gifts are generally smaller and solicited through phone calls and direct mail pieces. “Most individuals begin their [financial] support of a college or university through participation in the annual fund” (Worth, 2002b, p. 19). Annual gifts are often utilized for current expenses and projects.

Major gift fundraising focuses on gifts that will be transformational to the institution. Major gifts tend to fall into three categories: regular, special and ultimate (Dunlop, 2000). Regular gifts are those that are given annually, or on some sort of regular timeline. Special gifts are generally given to help the institution meet a special need and tend to be more than the donor generally gives (Dunlop). An ultimate gift is the “largest philanthropic commitment the giver is capable of making” (Dunlop, p. 310). Fundraising at this level is focused on building relationships with the potential donor, learning about their experiences on campus and their current passions (Dunlop)

Student and academic affairs staff generally have a good feel for current student trends and concerns. Alumni staff needs to work with these areas to understand the trends occurring in the student experience and what the university experience is like for students (Jablonski, 1999). This would allow alumni staff to plan alumni programs more effectively for young alumni (Nostrand, 1999). Other areas would also benefit from this relationship in having the opportunity to connect successful alumni back to programs on campus as presenters, mentors or donors.

### Summary

There has been extensive research conducted on trying to predict alumni giving and determine if alumni will give based on a wide range a variables relating to demographic information, their student experience, and involvement as alumni. It is clear

that alumni give for a variety of reasons, but the common theme is that they care about their alma mater for some reason. Institutions of higher education really do not know what creates an emotional attachment or when it is created. Understanding this piece would have a significant impact on alumni relations, fundraising and student affairs on every college campus.

Chapter three will look in detail at the research methods used for this study. This will be a qualitative study, and the rationale for that will be explored further. Interviews and focus groups will be the primary methods used for data collection. Analysis of the data will be described in detail.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examined the development of alumni loyalty through alumni from a variety of academic backgrounds and graduation years. The focus was to determine what experiences play a role in shaping or forming alumni loyalty, and determining at what point alumni loyalty forms. Much research has been conducted on why students stay at an institution through graduation, and research has been conducted on predicting alumni giving and what motivates alumni to give. No known research has been conducted on what forms the connection alumni have with their alma mater.

Chapter three provides the rationale for this study's design and methodology. The justification for the use of qualitative research is given. Detailed descriptions will be provided of the population and sample used, the data collection methods utilized and data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the researcher's bias and assumptions related to the study.

#### Problem and Purposes Overview

A priority for university administrators is keeping alumni connected to the institution after they graduate. By keeping alumni connected, they hopefully will feel good about their alma mater and contribute back through financial gifts or their time and talent. When alumni are students their opinions of the institution are formed, and those opinions continue after they graduate. Factors occurring while an alumnus was a student and factors following graduation have an impact on loyalty (Ridley & Boone, 2001).

While students are on campus, the institution is not taking into consideration what variables create alumni loyalty and will later contribute to alumni deciding to support their alma mater. Better information is needed about factors occurring while the student is on campus that effect the development of alumni loyalty. It is not currently known what about the undergraduate experience impacts the formation of an emotional attachment. There is not an understanding of how the student experience shapes later alumni loyalty.

With continued decreased funding in public higher education there needs to be an increase in additional revenue streams of support. Increasing alumni giving and support is an option that could assist. Alumni are important to the continued health and prestige of an institution. They are key to the institution's continued growth and success. It is becoming more important than ever to understand what motivates alumni to support their alma mater.

The research currently available related to alumni support is predominantly quantitative, focusing on demographic and undergraduate variables used to predict alumni giving or involvement. While some studies have an open ended question at the end of the survey, there are very few qualitative studies in this area and no known research on what occurs during the undergraduate experience to create alumni loyalty.

Alumni support is an important topic and many institutions question how they can increase alumni support, but even more important is finding out what motivates alumni to support their undergraduate institution. Studies show willingness to contribute is affected by undergraduate experiences (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Johnson & Eckel, 1998). While there are many factors occurring after graduation that contribute to alumni support, there are just as many, if not more, that occur while students are still on campus.

The purpose of this study was to create a better understanding of how the student experience shapes alumni loyalty, and to determine how alumni loyalty is formed. Gaining a better understanding of alumni loyalty would be beneficial in looking at alumni programs as well as creating partnerships with other areas on campus that possibly impact the formation of loyalty. An understanding of how and when alumni loyalty is formed could allow institutions to impact shaping it, which could contribute to future alumni support.

### Research Questions

Multiple factors contribute to the development of alumni loyalty. If these factors are known, they can be used to shape the student experience and predict future alumni giving and involvement. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do alumni define loyalty?
2. How do alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater?
3. What undergraduate experiences impact long-term affiliation or disaffiliation with one's alma mater?
4. At what point does loyalty to one's alma mater form?
5. What impacts the formation of loyalty?
6. What can be done to improve the student experience to increase the chances of loyalty formation?
7. What motivates alumni to support, or inhibits them from supporting, their alma mater?

## Rationale for Using Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an important piece of the research puzzle currently missing in alumni research. Quantitative research provides statistics that let researchers and practitioners know there is something going on that increases, or decreases, the likelihood of something occurring. “Quantitative data tell us how much, how often, and how many” (Preskill & Torres, 1999). Qualitative research assists in answering why these things occur. It “...inform[s] us of the how, what, and why of what we are studying” (Preskill & Torres, p. 105). Both are important to the increase of knowledge for researchers and practitioners. Much of the current research on alumni giving and involvement is quantitative. Qualitative research can assist to answer the “why” for some of the quantitative research results.

Qualitative research is interested in how people perceive and make meaning of their world and their experiences. Researchers seek to understand phenomenon, processes, and perspectives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). There is an emphasis on the process as well as the end product, and the findings are a holistic description with rich detail and descriptions (Fraenkel & Wallen).

Data in qualitative research are collected using several different methodologies. Qualitative researchers utilize individual interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis to triangulate findings. Multiple approaches allow the researcher to describe, explain, compare, and understand the data (Merriam, 1998).

Focus groups are utilized to gather opinions and create a better understanding of what people believe about a topic (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Participants are selected based on set criteria. Each group should be conducted with four to ten participants (Fraenkel & Wallen; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Interviews are conducted as a way to learn what people think and believe about the topic being studied (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Interviews are one-on-one and allow people the opportunity to tell their stories. Stories are essential to a meaning-making process (Seidman, 1998). “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, p. 3).

Analysis of qualitative data is conducted throughout the entire process by taking field notes and studying the information collected. Recurring patterns and themes will emerge within the data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Multiple sources of data are used for the researcher to triangulate the data and ensure the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations (Fraenkel & Wallen).

#### Population and Sample

The research site selected for study was a medium size, comprehensive, public university located in the state of Missouri. The university had a student body of approximately 11,000 with the undergraduate population representing 9,000 students. There were 81,460 living and contactable alumni of the university. The population for this study was the alumni from this institution. A purposive sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) was utilized, allowing the researcher to select participants based on known criteria about the population (Fraenkel & Wallen; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998).

In an effort to avoid the possibility of a convenience sample in selecting the interview groups, all graduates of the university who completed their undergraduate



degree and had an active e-mail address on file with the alumni office were invited to participate in the study. The alumni office at the university being used for this study reported to the Interim Executive Director of the Foundation. The Interim Executive Director of the Foundation sent an e-mail alerting alumni of the study and the benefit it could mean to the institution (Attachment A). The following week the researcher sent an e-mail inviting alumni to participate in the study (Attachment A). Included in the invitation e-mail was a link to a form that participants completed and submitted to indicate their willingness to participate in the study (Attachment A).

Those who completed the form were separated into three groups: donors (those who had made a monetary gift to the university in the past year); non-donors (those who had never made a monetary gift to the university); and those who had not made a gift to the university in two or more years. Since individuals in this group were not current donors and were not non-donors they were eliminated from consideration for interviews. Fifteen donors and fifteen non-donors were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews. Utilizing geographic regions in which they currently live, gender, degree year, and college from which they received their degree, the researcher selected interview participants so that the two groups consisted of a similar make up.

Those selected for interviews were contacted via e-mail to alert them of their selection as participants in the study (Attachment A). A follow-up phone call was made to set an interview date, time and location, with a confirmation e-mail sent immediately following the phone call confirming the interview (Attachment A). The participants all received a copy of the Informed Consent Form with the confirmation e-mail (Attachment F). Following the completion of the 30 interviews, those who expressed interest in the

study but were not selected were sent an e-mail thanking them for their interest and letting them know they were not included in the study (Attachment A).

The Alumni Association Board of Directors and the Foundation Board of Directors, two groups that already existed and met regularly, were utilized for the two focus groups. The Foundation Board of Directors had 25 active members and the Alumni Association Board of Directors had 19 active members. Each focus group had eight to ten participants. Focus group participants were selected based on geographic region in which they currently live, gender, degree year, and college from which they received their degree in an effort to represent a cross section of the alumni population.

All members of both boards were sent an e-mail from the Interim Executive Director of the Foundation alerting them of the research and letting them know they would be contacted to participate in the study (Attachment C). A week later each participant was sent an e-mail from the researcher inviting them to participate in the focus group (Attachment C). A follow-up phone call was made to answer any questions and confirm their participation, with a confirmation e-mail sent immediately following the phone call confirming the focus group (Attachment C). The participants received a copy of the Informed Consent Form with the confirmation e-mail (Attachment F).

#### Data Collection and Instrumentation

Qualitative research methods were used in this study. Individual interviews and focus groups were the primary sources of data collection. Thirty individual interviews and two focus groups were conducted. Observation and member checking were also utilized to triangulate the data and provide validity of the findings.

### *Interview Protocol*

Thirty semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted (Fraenkle & Wallen, 2003). With a semi-structured interview there was a defined set of questions, but it allowed the researcher the flexibility to ask follow up questions to expand the interviewee's answers and provided additional data (Merriam, 1998).

All graduates of the university who completed their undergraduate degree and had an active e-mail address on file with the alumni office were sent an e-mail from the Interim Executive Director of the Foundation alerting them about the study (Attachment A). The following week the researcher sent an e-mail to the same group inviting them to participate in the study (Attachment A). Included in the invitation was a link to a form that participants completed and submitted to indicate their willingness to participate in the study (Attachment A).

Those that completed the form were separated into three groups: donors (those who had made a monetary gift to the university in the past year); non-donors (those who had never made a monetary gift to the university); and those who had not made a gift to the university in two or more years. Since individuals in the third group were not current donors and were not non-donors they were eliminated from consideration for interviews. Fifteen donors and fifteen non-donors were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews. Utilizing geographic regions in which they currently live, gender, degree year, and college from which they received their degree, the researcher selected interview participants so that the two groups consisted of a similar make up.

Following the selection of the interview groups, those selected were contacted in order to arrange an interview. An e-mail was sent alerting them of their selection in the

study (Attachment A). A follow up phone call was made to set an interview date, time and location, with a follow up e-mail sent immediately following the phone call confirming the interview (Attachment A). The participants received a copy of the Informed Consent Form with the confirmation e-mail (Attachment F).

Each interview was conducted at a location convenient for the participant. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Prior to the interview beginning, the researcher again explained the study, answered any questions, and ensured the participant had completed the Informed Consent Form (Attachment F). During the interview, alumni were asked a series of questions about their experiences with the university as a student and as an alumnus, and their perspective on alumni loyalty and alumni support of the university (Attachment B). The protocol used in both the focus groups and individual interviews were field tested to ensure that the participant's answers addressed the research questions that guided study. Field testing occurred prior to the interview phase of data collection. During the interviews, additional follow-up questions were utilized based on the direction of the comments.

#### *Focus Group Protocol*

Two focus groups were conducted. A productive focus group is considered to be one with four to ten participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Krueger & Casey, 2009). For this study each focus group consisted of eight to nine participants. "Focus groups are composed of participants who are similar to each other in a way important to the researcher" (Krueger & Casey, p. 7). For this study members of the university's Foundation Board of Directors, which had 25 active members, and the Alumni

Association Board of Directors, which had 19 active members, were utilized. Members of these groups were alumni that were actively involved with the university. The role of these groups was to make decisions impacting alumni involvement and support to the institution. The composition of each focus group was a balance of men and women and a mix of different graduation years and academic degrees.

Members of both boards were sent a letter from the Interim Executive Director of the Foundation alerting them of the research and letting them know they would be contacted to participate in the study (Attachment C). Eight to nine members from each board were selected for the focus groups. The following week the researcher sent an e-mail to each board member selected to participate (Attachment C). A follow up phone call was made to answer questions and confirm participation, with a confirmation e-mail containing the focus group details sent immediately following the phone call (Attachment C). The participants received a copy of the Informed Consent Form with the confirmation e-mail (Attachment F).

Each focus group occurred during the summer when these groups already had scheduled meetings. Both were hosted in a conference room and lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups were video recorded, and during each focus group the researcher took field notes, and noted key discussion items, body language and interactions of the group. The field notes were typed and the focus groups' video recordings transcribed verbatim.

Prior to the focus groups beginning, the researcher again described the study and answered any questions. Each participant had completed the Informed Consent Form and returned it to the researcher (Attachment F). Focus group participants were asked a series

of questions regarding what they believed are characteristics of loyal alumni, how alumni exhibit loyalty, and what they believe impacted the development of alumni loyalty and future alumni support to the university (Attachment D). The questions used for the focus groups were field tested to ensure the answers to the questions asked would answer the research questions in the study, and to minimize possible confusion. Field testing occurred prior to the focus group phase of data collection.

### Data Analysis

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involved consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In qualitative research, data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection; otherwise the data would have been unfocused and overwhelming (Merriam).

Research notes were taken during the two focus groups and each of the thirty interviews. These notes were typed for analysis. Focus group and interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, which provided the best data for analysis (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Transcripts of randomly selected interviews and field notes were sent to the interviewee and a “member check” conducted where the researcher “provided data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asked them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, p. 204). A member check was conducted with one member of each focus group as well.

For data analysis purposes, each line of the focus group and interview transcripts were numbered. The transcripts were read and notes were taken on potential themes and categories. The transcripts were cut apart based on key points and then all similar

statements were grouped by the categories that had emerged during the research process (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 1998). “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (Merriam, p. 179). Categories emerged based on the number of people that mentioned something, the frequency something arose in the data, or the uniqueness of the data that should be retained (Merriam). Merriam shared guidelines to be used “to determine the efficacy of categories” (p. 183). Categories should: (a) reflect the purpose of the study; (b) be exhaustive; (c) be mutually exclusive; (d) be sensitizing; and (e) be conceptually congruent.

To ensure credibility in analysis of the data a two-part coding system was required, open and axial, which were used to sort and assign categories to the data making it manageable during the analysis process (Merriam, 1998). Open coding is the initial stage of selecting and naming categories from the analysis of the data. Variables are identified, labeled, categorized and related together in an outline form (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer, 2010). Axial coding is the next stage after open coding. In axial coding, data are put together in new ways in order to make explicit connections between categories and sub-categories in an effort to explain and understand relationships within the data to create a better understanding (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer).

Triangulation using multiple data sources, interviews, focus groups and observation was used to establish validity of the data collected by comparing multiple sources of information to confirm emerging findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam,

1998). The use of triangulation also “improves the quality of the data that is collected and the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations” (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 521).

### Research Biases and Assumptions

To alleviate researcher bias, clarification was needed about the “researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). The researcher worked in the advancement field and had a student affairs background. This researcher believed alumni loyalty was created while students are on campus and that little can be done to change attitudes toward the university once the student graduates. Experiences students had while attending the university impact their opinions of the institution, which plays a role in whether or not they support their alma mater in the future. To minimize this bias, the researcher utilized member checking of the analysis of the data, and triangulation of the various data sources.

### Summary

This researcher conducted a qualitative study to investigate the formation of alumni loyalty. The research methods utilized are focus groups and individual interviews. All focus group and individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was ongoing. Transcripts were reviewed for patterns and themes. Member checking was utilized to limit researcher bias and ensure accurate interpretation of the findings.

Chapter four will describe in detail the findings from the study described above. Chapter five will explore the conclusions drawn from the findings in chapter four based on this research and on past research.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This qualitative study examined how the undergraduate experience impacts the formation of alumni loyalty. This study sought to investigate if the undergraduate experience impacts later attachment and support for their alma mater, as well as determine how alumni define and exhibit loyalty. Alumni from several different decades were interviewed about their undergraduate and alumni experiences. Two focus groups were also conducted. Both groups consisted of alumni that work to promote alumni involvement and engagement with the institution.

Multiple factors contribute to the development of alumni loyalty. If these factors are identified, they can be used to shape the student experience and predict future alumni giving and involvement. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do alumni define loyalty?
2. How do alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater?
3. What undergraduate experiences impact long-term affiliation or disaffiliation with one's alma mater?
4. At what point does loyalty to one's alma mater form?
5. What impacts the formation of loyalty?
6. What can be done to improve the student experience to increase the chances of loyalty formation?
7. What motivates alumni to support, or inhibits them from supporting, their alma mater?

## Participants

Data was collected for this study through thirty interviews and two focus groups. Alumni were invited to sign up for participation in the interviews. Those who volunteered to participate in the interviews were separated into three groups: donors (those who have made a monetary gift to the university in the past year); non-donors (those who had never made a monetary gift to the university); and those who had not made a gift to the university in two or more years. Since they were not current donors and were not non-donors the group of alumni who had not made a gift in two or more years were eliminated from consideration for interviews. Fifteen donors and fifteen non-donors were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews.

In order to interview a cross section of the alumni base and ensure the two groups were comparable, the following criteria were used in determining the interview participants: graduation year, college that conferred their degree, and current residence. Each group had an equal balance of men and women, with two to three graduates per decade from the 1950s through the 2000s. The donor group had one graduate from the 1940s. Each of the five academic colleges were represented by at least two participants, with no more than four participants holding degrees from any one college. Nine in each group currently live in the state of Missouri and six in each group are currently residing in other states. Information about each group can be found in Appendix G. One noteworthy discrepancy between the two groups is that in the donor group, seven participants had received additional degrees from the same institution from which they had received their undergraduate degree, while only two non-donors had received

additional degrees from the same institution. Additionally, four donors and seven non-donors had received advanced degrees from other institutions.

Members from the university's Alumni Association Board of Directors and Foundation Board of Directors comprised the focus groups. The Alumni Association Board of Directors consists of graduates of the university. It is an advisory board to the Office of Alumni Relations and represents the interests of all graduates of the university. The Foundation Board of Directors consists of both alumni and donors to the university. They are responsible for the financial well being of the foundation. They determine the investments and policies that govern the daily operation of the foundation and its employees. Members of both boards are selected through a nominating committee and approved by each of the boards.

The Alumni Association Board of Directors focus group included eight participants, three men and five women, with graduation years ranging from 1969 to 2000. Participants had served between one and six years on the board. The Foundation Board of Directors focus group included nine participants, six men and three women, with graduation years ranging from 1966 to 1980, and one non-degreed alumnus, meaning that they have taken classes at the institution but have not completed a degree. Most participants had served on the board between one and eleven years, with one participant having been involved for 38 years. Additional information about the focus group participants can be found in Appendix G.

The questions used in the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups were not the same. Questions asked of the interview participants focused on their individual experience as both a student and alumnus of the institution. They examined their

relationship and experiences with the university from the time they decided to attend to the present. One question asked them to share their thoughts related to all alumni. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B. The focus group questions were broader, asking for their views on alumni overall, not necessarily about their individual experiences individual experiences, however, were shared. The focus group questions can be found in Appendix D.

### Data Analysis

Focus group and interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, to provide the best data for analysis (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Notes from the interviews and focus groups were shared with a few participants to conduct a “member check” where the researcher “provides data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, p. 204).

To ensure credibility in analysis of the data, a two-part coding system was utilized, open and axial, to sort and assign categories to the data, making it manageable during the analysis process (Merriam, 1998). Open coding is the initial stage of selecting and naming categories from the analysis of the data. Variables are identified, labeled, categorized and related together in an outline form (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer, 2010). Axial coding followed the open coding. In axial coding, data are put together in new ways to make explicit connections between categories and sub-categories in an effort to explain and understand relationships within the data to create a better understanding (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer). Lastly, triangulation was utilized using multiple data sources. Interviews, focus groups and observation were used to establish validity of the data

collected by comparing multiple sources of information to confirm emerging findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam).

### Undergraduate Experience

To learn about participants' undergraduate experiences, questions were asked why they chose to attend the university, what their experiences were like in and out of the classroom, and if the experience met their expectations. The two focus groups answered questions about the role they believe different undergraduate experiences play in later alumni loyalty.

#### *Choosing to Attend*

Each participant's decision to attend this university was made for a variety of reasons. Some of the most frequent reasons provided were: location, convenience, the campus, academic reputation, affordability, and family history. The reasons were similar among both interview groups. Often the location and convenience were intermixed. Several indicated they had grown up in the area. D4 commented "because it was about three blocks from my house. That was the reason. At the time, and I am sure it still is, it was a quite well accepted academic institution." D10 shared:

I chose it because of the location. Also, where I grew up, eighty, ninety percent of kids that I went to high school with went to college at [an institution nearby] since we were so close and I was looking for something a little different. And also, for economic reasons. It was a good value for me.

Others indicated that they were living in the area when college became an option. ND10 stated, "when I was retired out of the Air Force one of my options was for an education and with there being a local college I went there. It was quick. I started and completed

my whole degree process in three years. I came in, did what I had to do and got out.” D14 commented:

I spent eight years in the Air Force. I got out in '80. I was living in town, in Missouri now since 1975 and I looked into the GI Bill and I looked into going to college. And being the first member of my family to have a college education. Even though my dad was very successful. So, I went and scoped out my options.

Some indicated wanting to live in a small town, away from parents, or near Kansas City, as ND2 indicated:

I choose to come here because, well, I needed to grow up a lot, and I felt that I was three hours away from home so I could have the opportunity to be independent and grow up and do things on my own and take responsibility of a lot of stuff that I didn't when I was still living with my parents. I still had the chance I could go home on the weekends if I absolutely wanted to. So it was a happy medium. And the small town, I went to a school where it wasn't tons of people in my classes. It was 30 or below in my classes. So I wanted to keep that, the same kind of atmosphere that I had in high school because I knew that if I had an auditorium full of people I wouldn't have learned, gotten the same experience out of the classes as I would have here.

The size and beauty of the campus were also cited as reasons to attend. AB4

shared the story of what sold her on the campus:

I saw a picture at a college fair at my high school and it looked great and we came up in January. It was when you could drive down the center of campus. We parked in front of the administration building, with the flag up and the white snow and the limestone buildings. Snow was untouched because it was Christmas Break and everyone was gone. It was absolutely gorgeous. I walked into the administration building and somebody in a red shirt and khaki pants was immediately there to greet us, smiles on, took us on a campus tour, showed us where the business program was.

Nearly half cited academic reputation and degree programs played a key role in their decision to attend. ND14 expressed, “it had the best degree program for what I wanted to major in, in about a four state area at the time.” D1 shared:

Well at the time, when I made the decision to go there. Ok, I had decided that I wanted to fly airplanes. If some of these idiot pilots we used for sky diving could do it then so could I. At the time I was at another institution when I decided to go aviation and started looking around at affordable Universities that were accredited, and geographic location to activities. The rates at this university were very reasonable. They had career placement programs for their graduates. So I decided to transfer.

Many indicated the affordability of attending the institution, citing being able to live at home or with family, award of scholarships, and overall cost, as ND6 shared:

So I actually got into a bunch of bigger name schools, whatever, but they were requiring me pay tuition and board and like thirty thousand dollars or something astronomical. And so, I wouldn't have to pay a lot of money and I'd rather go there, a place that was a little bit smaller but I didn't feel like I would stand out there, plus I didn't want the loans and whatever. And then obviously my aunt was here, I never would have even heard of it if she hadn't turned me on to the program, I guess.

Seven of those interviewed, five donors and two non-donors, were legacies who had parents and other family members attend prior to them attending or while they were attending. D12 expressed:

The location was a part of it. Family history. I had a cousin that played football there, and hooked me up with the football coach...My mother was a one room country school teacher who had gone there. It goes back to why I went there, because of the family connection.

Five donors indicated that they were first generation college students. ND12 indicated, "I had a mother and dad who didn't get to go to college, but very much believed in education."

### *Expectations*

Nearly all those interviewed indicated that their experience at the institution either met or exceeded their expectations. When asked, D15 exclaimed:

It was better! It was more than I expected. I mean, it was a good school. You know, it was affordable. You know they had, the teachers were amazing and as I was a student, Senior I think, and my professors were

trying to set me up with interviews with different companies to try and get me a job. I know one of them, I went on an interview with one of them to a pharmaceutical company in Kansas City because one of the professors forwarded my resume up. You, just had a really amazing time. I learned a lot about myself, a lot about my education, you know, it was just, it was a good school.

D5 also shared, “It was actually more than I expected. A fair number of people in my business who would say that the university was small time, but to me it was huge.” One participant (D12) indicated, “I had no idea what to expect. I grew up in a rural part of the state. I had no idea what going to college was like. I just, I had no idea what I was getting into.”

### *Funding Education*

The cost to attend the university has changed over the years, but the way students fund their education has not. Thirteen of those interviewed had scholarships, with an equal split between donors and non-donors. Three indicated that they had received full scholarships. D3 commented:

I was a Regent scholar so my tuition was free for my entire career. And, I had a couple other scholarships: a music scholarship, a student ambassador. I was a student ambassador for several years, a couple other things I can never remember that were scholarships. So technically I did not pay the university a dime the whole time.

Eight non-donors had utilized loans to pay for school, while only three donors did.

Parents assisted approximately half of both groups. ND1 shared:

My parents helped me. I did FAFSA and they paid for what was indicated that they paid for and from there I had loans. By the time that I got out it was pretty minimal, the loans that I had, and I was able to pay it off in like two years.



Parents were the primary source of funding for seven of the donors and only two non-donors. Several of those whose parents paid for their education expressed that they wished they had been made to contribute in some way. D9 expressed:

My parents, that was one thing that they just sacrificed to was to pay for education and it was a very important thing to them. But in some respects I kind of wish that they had made me do it myself and wanted to pay it through. Or pay for it at graduation or something, just it makes it so I was a little bit more responsible with the money that went to the actual college expenses.

Everyone in both groups worked the summers and a majority worked during the academic year. Those who had full-ride scholarships or financial support from their parents indicated they worked to have spending money and fund extracurricular activities. Several in the donor group worked multiple jobs, and even full-time, in order to attend the university. D12 shared how he paid for school:

I was one of those people that went to school and was poor and knew it. A lot of people are poor and don't know it. I grew up in a family I was the oldest of three boys, both my brothers were handicapped. My family did not have money. We grew up on a farm. My folks were good people, very hard working, strong values, strong commitment, they did their best. I paid for college by working. I had more jobs than anybody. During the season I had a \$28 a month scholarship. We lived in an old army barracks, it was called the annex, made out of plywood, naval barracks is what it was. It's now gone. Wind would blow through this thing, and it would blow things across the floor almost. It was terrible. It wouldn't pass housing codes today. I worked for a furniture store moving furniture, worked as a bartender and gate keeper, bouncer. I left that place at 2 o'clock in the morning and went to the Baptist church to sweep up and set up chairs for Sunday school. I'd finish that experience by 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning. I went from the bar to the church. I worked hard. I worked for different people in the community. The people in the community were great to me. They knew I didn't have any money. I delivered flowers on holidays. I did whatever I needed to do to make ends meet. I cooked, I washed dishes. Like I said I had more jobs than anybody.

In both groups a majority used several different methods to fund their education. D1 expressed:

Well, I took out tons and tons of student loans, then when I exhausted my federal student loans I enlisted so I could get the GI Bill. So, direct loans and the GI Bill. I had a full-time job the entire time I went through.

The cost of college has changed over time, but the need has not. ND15 expressed it this way:

Of course college was a lot cheaper then. It just seemed much, much more affordable then, than it does today. Even though, money was always hard to get. But yeah, it was a combination of scholarships and working during the summer primarily. Although I did continue to work on the weekends. But I can remember, you know, not having a cent to my name, too.

### *Student Involvement*

Interview participants were asked if they were involved in any extracurricular activities as students. Twelve donors and nine non-donor indicated that they were involved in some sort of activity. When asked about involvement, ND11 commented, “You had the opportunity. If you wanted to get into anything you could do it. All you had to do was just have the desire to do something.”

Participants’ involvement included academic clubs, Greek life, student government, collegiate and intramural sports, and music ensembles. Of the three donors who were not involved, one was married and commuted and the other two worked full time. Of non-donors who were not involved, three were non-traditional students, two worked full time, and one was not interested. Nine (five donors and four non-donors) indicated they were involved in the Greek system. Many held leadership positions within one or more organization. When asked what they gained from being involved, friendship

was the number one response, followed by opportunity, skill development, and experience.

When sharing the impact involvement had on friendship, D6 shared, “just the companionship. Because I was living at home, I had no brothers, no sisters. I had no association with anyone, so it was a way for me to make and have friends to do things with.” D13 put it this way: “I met some guys, friends that are still pretty good friends, which date back over 40 plus years. I would not have met those good friends if I had not been involved.” Another aspect of the friendships that were gained was networking. D10 shared that networking, skill development and opportunity were key:

You meet a lot of people. That social interaction and developing networks with people. Learning how to work with teams and those organizational structures. And you know, most kids who go there are from rural Missouri, very small towns where they have been around the same people their whole life. Then you come to the university and you meet people and get to know about people you haven't known your whole life. And you get to learn about them and learn valuable skill.

In recounting skills that were gained from being involved in extracurricular activities, skills mentioned included time management, structure of meetings, working with others to accomplish goals, working in teams, communication skills, social skills, and being able to apply what was learned in the classroom. ND2 described her experience this way:

For one, I mean probably just on a personal level, would be time management. I learned, especially being as involved as I was from the beginning of school to the end of school. I had to learn that time management, learn, you know, how to balance classes and extracurricular activities and also having my own personal life, too. But on top of that social skills. Communication skills. Being able to just like strike up a conversation with anybody would, is awesome. Because some people can't do that. And whenever I first started at the school it was hard for me to do stuff like that. But, it's even helped with working retail and

stuff has kind of rolled into everything. But I would say that the social skills were probably the best.

By being involved afforded opportunities that students would otherwise not have had. ND13 talked about opportunities she had to attend conferences that she would not have had if she had not been involved, “one of the advisers, she was really good about saying, if you guys want to go to this conference and it's in Minneapolis, we can do it. It's just a matter of getting the funding, and so we would do that.” D5 share that opportunities allowed him to learn and make mistakes, “I found that my experiences on campus with the radio station and things of that nature were absolutely invaluable, allowing me to make mistakes, screw up, not be slapped, and just continue to learn by doing.”

Those who indicated holding leadership positions shared similar skill development, but in some cases at a higher level, citing that they had to be more responsible and manage people. ND14 shared that, “you learn how to be an outside of the box thinker. You learn how to direct. You learn how to listen and think on your feet a great deal.” D10 shared:

I think developing communication skills is the best thing that I got out of there. Other than learning, having to work with these teams, but being able to communicate in front of a group. Being able to communicate formally and informally with them. I grew up on a farm and our closest neighbor was two miles away so you didn't get to talk to too many people. It was very difficult at first, but that was our home.

The feeling of responsibility and learning to manage people was expressed by ND2 in this way:

Having processes on your shoulders and you having to teach all 50 other members what you are wanting and getting out of them. It's just kind of like you being a manager of somebody else. Everybody is relying on you and trusting in you to make sure that things are getting done right. So it was a lot of stress but a lot of that was exciting, and

very gratifying, to know in the end you have the outcome that was so spectacular.

D3 also shared how, due to holding leadership positions, she developed new skills and was able to apply what she had learned in the classroom:

I learned how to get other people to be motivated and do what we needed to do. I learned how to hold people accountable and to put them up on a path to success instead of letting them fail. Like being proactive and bringing people on-board, and good communication skills. All of those things I learned through practical experience.

Overall involvement created a connection to the university, allowing students to feel like they were a part of something bigger. Two participants shared this very clearly. ND15 stated, “Oh, you know it just ties you more to the university. Anything that you do that involves the social aspect of the university makes you feel more a part of it.” ND6 stated it this way, “You know you were part of something, you were definitely a big part of the success or failure of it.”

The focus groups discussed what role they believed extracurricular activities played in the college experience. Both groups generally agreed that involved students are successful students. AB6 stated, “Active students are successful students. Students who are not involved do not succeed as well.” There was also the belief that involved students become involved alumni as stated by FB9 “active student participation leads to active adult participation, and if a student is active in government or whatever it is that leads into those kind of activities.”

There was also a belief that extracurricular activities are what connect people to the institution. FB6 shared, “I think those extracurricular clubs or associations are huge in tying people back to the university.” FB7 shared his theory on involvement and alumni connections:

I think the involvement of activities on campus while you're here correlates to the number of times people come back to the university physically and secondly probably coming back to the university via a check and wanting to give back to the university. I think that their social experiences would probably correlate to a reason why they would want to help others have the same kind of experience they had while they were here. And the more involved they were on campus it might correlate back to the reason why they want to give others that same opportunity.

### *Education Received*

When asked about the education received, glowing responses were shared about how well prepared participants were to enter the work force and how they were competitive with students who had attended what were considered top schools in their fields. The entire donor group, thirteen of the non-donor group, all of the alumni board, and a majority of the foundation board believed that the institutions provided a very high quality education. D3 three commented:

Yeah, and I got an excellent degree. I feel like I have been able to hold my own against people that I have worked with, you know, that came from Harvard and UCLA and Stanford and all the big names. I feel like I had an excellent preparation. I feel like I have been successful in my career because of what I learned there.

D10 went on to say:

Oh, I think it's been outstanding. To give you an illustration, when I got out of college first I worked with some guys that went to Ivy League schools and you know they knew a lot more about English Literature than I did, but as far as the skills they had to be able to compete with them and work at their level I had no problems whatsoever. And I thought the education was outstanding. My philosophy, too, is, I think it is more related to what the individual is willing to put into it as well and that's just as important. You could have a really great school and not get anything out of it.

Several cited that they did not appreciate the quality of the education they were receiving at the time, but realized once they were working in their fields what a solid

foundation they had been provided. ND15 shared “I think it was an excellent education. You know, in retrospect I did not appreciate it as much when I was actually involved in it as when I think back on it.” D1 also had similar feedback:

Well actually at the time while I was in school I didn't think that the education was all that great. It seemed almost kind of easy, however after being out and seeing what I knew versus what other people knew and could actually apply that. I would absolutely recommend it without a doubt.

One alumna who did not end up working in her field commented (ND8):

Well, even though I didn't do anything with my actual major, I realized what you worked for, it really didn't matter what you majored in as long as you had a good GPA from a good school and you had that full college degree then companies were willing to train you to do whatever they needed you to do as long as you had that background. So, I thought it was a good college and I had a good degree, good GPA, so that opened the door for me.

One non-donor shared that that getting a degree was something that he needed to do in order to move on to the next point in his life. ND10 stated, “It was fine. It was just basically I knew it was something I had to do so I kind of quickly used it for what I had to do as a tool. I looked at it as a job. So I had to look at it that way so I could get out in three years.”

When participants were asked if they were challenged, most indicated that they were, while some shared that they were not challenged to the level that they had expected to be. Several indicated that they were underprepared for college. D3 commented:

As much as I loved where I grew up, I was not challenged academically in that school at all. And so by the time I got to college I was definitely deficient in quite a few areas and I didn't know it, because I went to one of these itsy bitsy little high schools. And then I got to college and realized, oh my gosh, I was just the best of the bad.

Others shared that they did not have the skills they needed when they entered. D12 shared:

My academic experience when I first started was a challenge. I did not know how to study. I was interested at that time. I thought all I had to do was show up, go to football practice, ball games. That was my focus. Academics were secondary. I ended up quitting school for a year. Then I was hit upside the head a couple of times with life experiences and I finally realized that I needed to be back in school. But my academic experience, my first almost two years was a challenge. When I came back I had to make A's and B's. I realized that going to class every day made a difference. I realized that reading the textbook and taking notes in class was important. Sitting on the front row made a difference.

Several shared that they believed it was hard work and that they needed to just stick with it. D13 phrased it like this, "I think it was a good experience. I mean I think I really learned it was not easy, there are some things that you just have to work at. Work hard at it, whether or not it is easy you've just got to stick to it, and keep working at it."

Many indicated that they were challenged because they were not as smart as they perceived their peers to be or did not grasp concepts as easily as others. D2 commented:

There are people who are really smart, but I am not one of them. Not that I am trying to knock myself down or anything, but I am more of a worker, someone who just has to work to achieve as opposed to people who are really smart and just pick up on things right away. So, so in that sense, there were always people in the classroom that were smarter than me. And I knew that. I just felt like if I worked hard then I would do well.

ND13 shared a similar insight:

You know, there were some of them that was very difficult for me. I'm not a naturally smart, academic person. Yeah, and so I kind of came to school thinking, "Yeah, you're actually going to have to work hard to make sure you don't fail out." And much to my surprise, I found myself on the Dean's list the first couple of semesters.

Many attributed their academic experience and what they learned and if they learned to the faculty they had. D8 shared, "looking back, I think it was all dependent on



the professor. In some courses, I felt very challenged intellectually, stretched. In other courses, sometimes it was just going, jumping through the hoops.” D10 reflected that:

I was challenged because I wasn't a great student. I didn't really have very good study skills. I didn't really pick those up until I was a sophomore in college. But there was just a lot of just maturity issues and discipline issues as well. But the professors that I had really taught me and worked with me. It was some of the services that they had at the university as far as reading labs, and tutorials, math labs, and things like that really kind of helped me kind stay on track and stay in school that first year. And then, you know, kind of help me improve.

Non-donors were the only ones that had anything negative to say about the education they received. Some of the perspective they shared was that they were not challenged, teaching styles were not congruent with their learning style, and lack of faculty in their academic program. ND2 shared that she was not challenged:

I do, in a way I had almost wished I was challenged more. Just because there were some times where I was, “ah, there's no need to study.” I didn't feel like I needed to study as much as if I went somewhere else possibly. The challenge wasn't as much as what I was expecting.

ND5 believed that overall there was very little challenge. He shared, “to me, a lot of it was nothing more than rote memorization. I would say that I had probably three classes. You have to keep in mind that I did five years. And, maybe three classes challenged me. Of those three, two of them were good experiences. I would say the education I received was slightly above average.”

One non-donor (ND7) flat out stated that the education she received was well below what other institutions provide based on course work she did after graduation. She commented:

Well I ended up taking classes there because I could, for free. And what I learned was, that my own education was very far inferior to like what half-education they teach there. And it really does. You had

to study hard to figure it out, nothing was spoon fed to you. It was a small class too, you know, it wasn't like the big universities that are impersonal, but just that I had the courses and I just found out that I guess actually to use the expression, and I don't mean this disrespectful now, but I am just going to tell you how it was at the time, anyway. I may have changed a lot since then, but this is back in the sixties and that's how I would compare it when I saw how other people were being educated.

Another non-donor (ND1) shared that she felt her academic experience would have been more enriched if there had been more than one faculty member in her department in order for her to gain additional perspectives.

Two non-donors shared that they believed they had received good educations, but believed the program did not prepare them for the reality of getting a job in the field they had hoped to work in. ND8 shared:

It was great. The only thing is, you know, I loved what I majored in and I did really good, had a great GPA. Had great teachers and everything. But you know, I just feel like I didn't get told, "Hey, you're not gonna make any money in this field. Or you're not gonna find a job in it." You know when I graduated with my degree and went looking for a job I discovered that I would have been better off to come in as a peon and working my way up through the ranks than going to school for four years of it. So, I just felt like I wasn't given more of a straight answer and that's how I ended up in the field I'm in today.

Overall, the focus group participants thought that the education provided at the institution was excellent and in many instances exceeded expectations. FB1 put it this way:

I think the quality of the education here meets or exceeds virtually any institution. It does not meet the high profile that some of the ivy league schools do or some of the big, D1, state schools, but at the end of the day wherever you go the quality of the education is dependent on the effort you put into it, and the tools are here and you can look around and see the success of the alumni have had it speaks for itself so your pride can come from your mascot or it can come from within and I think the institution does a good job of giving people, because of the class size, because of the size of the campus, it gives people that would not

necessarily excel or get into leadership positions at bigger schools the opportunity to develop those skills.

There was only one focus group participant that voiced anything negative. This member shared that she believed that the teaching of the fundamentals were lacking. FB9 stated, “I really see a lack of emphasis on writing well, spelling, and speaking well, not that I’m an expert but I’ve graded a few papers on the college level that I was absolutely amazed, and I think we need more emphasis on that now.”

### *Personal Change*

When interview participants were asked if they changed during college, a majority of the participants said yes, including all donors and twelve non-donors. When asked in what ways, the two most common answers were that the institution expanded their world, and that they grew up. ND11 shared, “Oh yes I developed more. Just broadening my outlook on what was out there. What I could do. What I was capable of. I really didn't know that I would be capable of much.” D10 elaborated further:

I think the different people I ran across from the bigger cities, different countries, different states, made my world a lot bigger than it had been in the past. And made me realize that, you know, that other people do things differently, see the world differently and helped me to relate to them a little bit better and also communicate with them where once you make that realization you don't need, not quite as homogeneous a society as I had come from. More interested in academic items. You know, a better understanding and a better desire to learn. That was a big change.

Both donors and non-donors shared that they thought they grew up in college. D5 shared, “you grow up in various ways in your life in various places. I grew up a lot while attending the institution because it was the first time that I had been anything but just a student.” ND14 shared a similar sentiment, “I got a lot more mature. A lot more outgoing. I matured tremendously. Just a whole different person. I was very social when I started as

well as when I left. But I had much more maturity and much broader thinking. It definitely widened my thinking.”

When asked what attributed to the changes they experienced while in college several attributed the changes to the faculty and their involvement in extracurricular activities. ND9 commented, “I think I changed and grew and became more professional in my learning style and my work. I think you, with the teachers and their expectations and their modeling of how a professional acts and their caring attitude.” ND11 shared that being able to be involved attributed to changes, “I had the opportunity to jump in there and get into anything you wanted to do. If you wanted to get in an organization and develop some part of you, you could do it.”

Most thought that the change they experienced was mostly attributed to the natural aging process. ND15 put it this way:

You know just that time of life when you’re going from eighteen to however old I was when I graduated. Oh gosh, twenty-four, twenty-five something like that, so that's a time in your life when you are changing dramatically anyway. I'm not sure you know, it's hard to say what part of that was just the natural stage of that life versus what part of attributable to the education I received.

Some went even further in identifying the biological aging process. ND1 explained, “I think it is kind of a maturational experience in general. I think your brain is really changing and I think that you are away from your parents for the first time. I think that I would attribute that to this whole experience itself instead of the time in your life.”

The overall sentiment was that this time in many of the participants’ lives was life altering. They developed new skills and learned a lot about who they were and who they had become. ND1 shared, “I would say that I grew a lot, learned a lot about myself and my values, and what I value. And I learned a lot about my work ethic.” One non-donor

believed that college was an opportunity to reinvent yourself and thought that is what the experience did for him. ND6 commented:

Coming out of high school I didn't really, I wasn't involved, I was in a few things, but I came out of my shell in college. So that helped, you know, getting involved in lots of different things and meeting new people. Re-inventing yourself, a lot of people do in college, and that definitely happened for me.

D2 shared this about changing during college:

What four years are more important in anyone's life? In college you are really kind of becoming who you are and I mean it is just a time where your horizon is expanding. Just think of people that you've known over the years and someone who has gone to college and someone who hasn't gone to college. And even if a person didn't graduate from college, it is just the fact that they have been to college and they had part of the college experience in the same sort of the world as a college student. It just changed them. But college made me grow up in a way that I wouldn't have otherwise. It made me more of, I don't know, it just made me more of what I am.

Those who did not believe that they changed saw going to school as a job, and that is how they treated it. They were not involved in any activities, and they worked to complete their degree as quickly as possible. For them, it was something that they had to do in order to reach another goal. ND5 shared, "The degree opened more doors to get a job, and some of the things I learned I was able to apply in relationship to employment and I think the big thing was perseverance."

### *Overall Experience*

Among all but a select few participants, the overall college experience was exceptional, and they got more out of it than they expected. D3 shared, "I really enjoyed everything that I did and really threw myself in it. It was a lifestyle, not just an education. I learned so much about myself as well as about how to be a professional. I thought it was just going to be hard work but it turned out to be fun."

Several participants attributed a portion of their overall experience to the campus, its size, beauty, location and the overall feel. The general consensus was that the classes were the right size, and the small town provided a good environment, but a city was nearby if needed. D10 reflected, “I just really liked the setting of the school, being in a smaller town but close enough to a city you could go there and do things if you wanted to but you still had the best of both worlds.”

Overall, participants thought that the campus provided a safe environment in which to learn. ND13 shared:

I think one of the things I'm probably, the word that comes to mind is comfortable, which would be a weird word to describe that, but, is that I felt our classes were close knit. So I was comfortable with other students and other faculty that were around me. I didn't feel like if I asked a question you know later on people would look at me and say “Oh my gosh, hello, you don't know that?” But it was very comfortable. It was easy to talk to people, it was easy to learn. It was easy to say, “Hey, would you back up because I totally didn't get what you were saying.”

Several commented that they believed that by being a part of the campus they were a part of something meaningful and bigger. D4 stated, “The nice thing about campus is, even though I have quite a few different degrees from different institutions, it's small enough that you can still do something meaningful there and feel like you are a part of it.”

Multiple participants, mostly donors, shared that they had the opportunity to try things and make mistakes in a safe environment, and they were able to learn from those mistakes. D5 commented, “I think the first was my ability to put my hands-on experience in media and be able to use them, make a mistake, learn from the mistake and then go on without consequences. It was great, great hands on learning experience. That was exceptional for me.” One component of trial and error process was faculty taking an

interest in their success. D12 reflected, “from this experience what I remember, I had an environment where, because I made mistakes, and I made many, I had people take the time to correct me. I remember many individuals who took time to take an interest in me.”

Several attributed their overall experience to the faculty who taught them and took an interest in them as a student. D10 shared, “the education value was outstanding. I thought the quality of professors that I had was really good, and their willingness to work with you as a student.”

When asked if there was anything that they disliked from their college experience most could not come up with anything. Several shared things they personally wished they had done differently, but nothing about the institution. D5 shared, “I didn't really perceive it as being bad there. I just couldn't. It was, the university was a big step up for me so I have very positive feelings about that.”

A majority of donors shared that they wished they had done some part of their college experience differently while only a few non-donors reflected upon that. Being involved in extracurricular activities, being more invested in their learning, and living on campus were all shared as things participants wished they had done differently.

Several shared that they wished they had gotten more involved in college. This sentiment came primarily from non-donors who reflected on what they wish they could change or what they would tell current students. ND8 commented, “I would tell them to get involved in more clubs and activities. I would tell them to go to more sporting events. I wish I had more time to go to football and basketball and really get involved.”

Several also commented that they thought they could have taken their education more seriously. These participants indicated that they had been more focused on their extracurricular activities. D9 reflected:

I don't know that I took my college very seriously. I really enjoyed just being involved in stuff and I thought, you know, I thought I could just sign up and be involved in everything...I was still kind of like, school work, I can get by without studying and stuff. It's all the other things I want to do. I regret that I did not put more focus into my studies. I was too busy having fun with all these things that I wanted to be in. And, that is a regret that I have. That I did not take that seriously.

Several participants commented upon where they lived as significant in their overall feeling of engagement with the institution. Two-thirds of the interview participants lived on campus at some point during their time in college, nine donors and eleven non-donors. Of those who did not live on campus, some lived at home and others were married. Several donors commented that by not living on campus they believed that they missed out on some things and did not have the opportunity to form some of the relationships that other students were able to form. D8 commented:

I never lived on campus because we were married and so I commuted. Looking back, you know I missed out on some things because of that, and so I lost. I never had that undergrad experience at the university which does have an impact on the friendships and things that you form. I did form some really good friendships with the people that were in my major, but I didn't form that relationship in the dorms. I think you get a unique perspective when you are in the dorms.

The focus groups discussed the overall college experience. One focus group discussed why the undergraduate experience is special and different from the experience students have when working on advanced degrees. FB6 hypothesized:

As you experience something for the first time it has a greater impact on you than experiencing it for the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> time, and as you first arrive at school there's a lot of apprehension, you're not sure how this



is going to work, this campus is well molded to, I think, nurture education and first time learners.

FB1 commented that for a student's first degree it is often the primary focus as opposed to the secondary focus. "When I finished my masters degree I was working full time and you just don't get that on-campus feel that you do when you're living on campus and that's your job. In a graduate program, that's a second job."

One of the focus groups discussed how those with similar experiences still have different connections to the institution. AB2 shaped the conversation this way:

I think about relationships too, and definitely relationships from the professor to the student, the student to staff, and with each other, have all touched and inspired and made me want to give back. However, I don't understand the fact that I have relationships with a sorority sister and they have yet to come back to campus. I don't really know, why it is different for me and it's different for somebody else who probably had very similar relations, very similar experiences here, but they haven't been back. I don't know what makes one person different than another in that regard. Our experiences are probably almost the same as far as relationships go.

The general consensus from this discussion is that there is a difference in emotional investment in the overall experience; some put more time and energy into the experience than do their peers.

### Relationships

Relationships are, as in every part of life, an aspect of the college experience. Questions were asked in an effort to gain an understanding of the relationships that are developed during the undergraduate experience and how those impact later connections to the institution. Interview questions asked about relationships with faculty, staff and students. Questions assessed their relationships while they were students and if those

relationships have been maintained over time. The focus groups were asked how relationships impact the undergraduate experience and later connections to the institution.

### *Faculty*

The majority of those interviewed thought they had quality faculty who were approachable, good instructors, and cared about student learning. In reflecting on faculty interactions, ND13 shared:

Early on I was afraid of faculty. I think most young, freshman probably are. You view them as, I thought they were these super intelligent people who if I asked them a question it was going to be extremely dumb and just totally crazy to ask it. And so, I didn't. I didn't interact and I got burned a few times. It was like, I probably should have told you about that, and I was kind of afraid of them. I had a public speaking lady, she was actually a grad student and she came into the class the first day in puffy, bunny slippers and that was my realization that faculty are human. And I thought, "OK, I can talk to you." And she talked a lot about that. "You know, I'm a graduate student but, I'm just the same, whether we use last names it's no big deal." So as I really got into my major, that was one of the best moves I made, was getting to know faculty. And the faculty of that department did a really good job of making you feel comfortable.

Along the same train of thought, ND7 commented, "I remember being able to talk to faculty. It wasn't such a big school that they were impersonal. I felt like I got to know professors, I always felt they were good professors."

Some indicated that the faculty they had were passionate about the subjects they taught and that could be seen by the students. They were excited to be teaching and excited about the subject. D9 reflected:

That was something that was pretty phenomenal. Now a lot of the classes that I took that were like General Ed, those teachers you could tell they had a passion for what they taught. Music Appreciation for example, and I regret that I don't remember the guys name, but oh he, he was passionate about music. The teachers just really seemed to truly love not only teaching, but what their field was in. Yeah. They still had that passion.

A more recent graduate (ND6) shared this experience with one of the faculty he had:

They were really good. All of the faculty and staff I had, I didn't have one bad teacher in my summation. They all, I think, really liked what they were doing and came from, one especially I remember, was excited to be here. He used to tell me he loved being at the university and loved teaching students and loved getting people excited about what he was excited about. All of them, I think, were good teachers that cared that you were doing well, but cared that you were learning the material as well.

Several participants indicated that because of a faculty member's love of a subject they learned to love it. D2 put it this way:

He knew everybody. He was always saying hi to people as they were coming in and asking them about this and that. And so he was just a great guy. But as a professor, I mean he was far and away the best lecturer ever. And then I felt like I just learned a ton. In fact, I thought about maybe even being a history teacher just because he was so good and I just loved it. And I still love history, ever since I had him I just have especially enjoyed it, and have continued to enjoy history.

Several indicated that being challenged academically had to do with the faculty, and that there were expectations set that they needed to live up to. ND12 stated it this way:

I guess I would have to say that, although I didn't interact with them a lot when I needed them, they were there. And they were good teachers. You were expected to do your work and that's what I needed. I mean, I needed to be brought up in an environment where you are expected to produce. Because that's the way the real world is.

In sharing a similar experience, ND5 commented, "really, he was one of them that did one of the classes that really challenged me. The nice thing about it was that it really gave me a good background that I didn't realize until much later. I hated the class though."

Most indicated that faculty were helpful and supportive. ND3 described it this way:

They were, let's see. The faculty, I think were very helpful. They weren't standoffish. It was more personal than what you might find in a large university kind of setting. But, the professors were very encouraging and positive. And helpful and you know. It wasn't the kind where they stand up and deliver a lecture and then walk out of the room. It was more of a caring type atmosphere there.

Multiple participants emphasized that faculty were their role models and became their mentors. D14 talked about faculty being role models:

You know it's funny, I do remember my instructors, the majority of them. And that's a positive thing when you can remember your instructors and remember some of the positive role models that they were. And see how they conduct themselves in real life too. The college actually prepared me.

D3 shared about the faculty mentors:

I felt like I just had mentors everywhere. All the professors just cared so much about what the students were doing and we just spent so much time together that it was more of a family. You had a lot of parents kind of thing. I had that relationship with almost all of my professors where we could talk and laugh and be human together and not just authority and learner.

A few participants indicated they did not have all positive interactions with faculty and did not believe they were invested in student learning. D10 shared his experience with faculty this way:

Well, some of them were great and some of them were not so great. There was one, well, as a general rule, the faculty was always available and willing to answer questions and to help you inside and outside of class. But of course there's a few professors that were not as accessible and were old and grouchy and just wanted to be left alone.

There was one non-donor who thought that faculty were not there for students. ND4 put it this way: "I think of all my professors that I had, and one in particular, teaching was just to support another habit."

Nine donors and four non-donors indicated maintaining relationships or staying in contact with faculty after graduation. D3 shared that she has stayed in contact with one of her instructors. “My piano teacher is a situation where I have stayed very close in touch with. We e-mail back and forth regularly and I usually see him every other year or so.”

One non-donor (ND13) attributes the relationships with faculty that she maintained after graduation to other opportunities she has had in her career:

When I first got out of school there were several of them we even went to lunch and they would ask what I'm doing. Once I got this job I needed to get students to work here and so we interact on that level. Me helping some of their students when they send them to me. In fact, that's how, when I began teaching this class, I had thought about doing adjunct years ago and had kids and all that. And they actually called me and said “Hey, you want to teach? We really need you to come over this fall if you do.” It's really nice that they think enough of me to call and say hey, do you want to teach this class. So, obviously if I hadn't maintained the contact it wouldn't have been there.

Nearly all of the donors expressed an interest in re-connecting with faculty to tell them “thank you”. One donor (D1) shared that she had done just that:

I've e-mailed a number of instructors thanking them for the level of instruction that I got. The word Nazi that I had for the technical report writing class, yeah I thought I knew how to write until I went into there. Wow I struggled. I was of course writing from the English where you write long sentences and embellishing everything, and she was to the point, and I would get these papers back and they would look like a crime scene there was so much red ink on them, I actually e-mailed her a couple of times saying thank you so much, it really helped my writing out a lot, tremendously. In class I told her that her class was like going to the dentist.

The focus groups both thought the relationships formed with faculty while a student is on campus plays an important role in the student's success. AB6 shared how the professors made him work harder to be successful:

I started reminiscing about all these professors I had. I remember walking in their classes and thinking I've got to be prepared for them. Forget my education, I've got to do what's best for them. I just, I didn't listen to every word I listened to his every syllable, it was just like pour it on pour it on, and I was so impressed, there was also that relationship. I could walk into their office and talk. Those were the relationships that happened.

Others shared about the impact faculty had on them outside of the classroom. AB4 had this to say:

I was not the stellar college student. I was really young and naïve when I attended and I wasn't a bad student I just wasn't a stellar student, I did not know what I wanted to do after graduation, had absolutely no idea. What I got aside from the classes was not that extracurricular in terms of the Greek Life and student organizations, but the professors who took an interest in me, and not just in my course work. I worked in the department and they taught me. I had never had a job before, and so they taught me how to work in an office and how to interact with people and to do anything, and I think that's one of those things that I took with me when I left the university and any job that I've had is that you do anything that you are asked to do and you do it well.

### *Turned Life Around*

Both focus group participants and participants in the donor group shared stories about how faculty played a role in getting them back on track when they made mistakes. These stories clearly had a profound impact on them and their experience, and have played a role in their decisions to give back to the institution. AB6 shared, "I remember one that pulled me to the side and said you're struggling not because of the material, but because you are drinking and chasing too much. I recognize the signs because I did it, too. And then he got me on track." AB4 shared a similar experience:

I had a professor sit me down in his office, his office was books everywhere, he sat me down and he looked at me he said you are having way too much fun and if you don't start making the grades you are never going to be successful in life. I was mortified that someone had said that to me. I was just so embarrassed, you know, but it got my attention.

D12 reflected that it is more work to correct someone than it is to just let them fail, and he had someone that took the time to take an interest in him and correct him:

I quit school for a year. Then I was hit upside the head a couple of times with life experiences and I finally realized that I needed to be back in school. At that time the Dean of Men, I remember coming in to see him and saying that I needed to get back in school. He looked at my transcript and he said are you sure? I said Yeah. The guy took tremendous interest in me, or he felt sorry for me, I don't know what the reasons were, but I would get a note every once in awhile from the Dean of Men saying come see him. Scared me. One of those times he told me that if I ever cash my scholarship check in a bar again, mind you it was \$28 a month, I would go to the local pubs and I'd have a sandwich and cash my check. He said if you ever cash one more scholarship check in a bar it will be your last. It scared me. I believe he would have done it. As I grew older and became a little bit more wise I realized that it takes time to stop and try and correct somebody. He could have not had interest in me. He could have just let it go.

### *Peers*

Relationships with peers are inevitable during an academic experience.

Participants spoke of relationships they formed with peers in their living environments, through extracurricular activities, and in the classroom. An equal number of donors and non-donors have remained in touch with peers since graduation. The donors' relationships seem to be deeper and more meaningful, with regular gatherings. Non-donors connections seem to be more superficial, such as exchanging holiday cards. Long term relationships with peers seems to be connected to shared group experiences.

Those who did not maintain long-term relationships shared they did not do much other than study and work. ND5 put it this way, "Life pretty much revolved around go to class, study. Go to work, sleep, study. Go to class. Some of the college students that I worked with, we'd go to the movies or whatever. You know, you had people that were in your life, then were out of your life." In reflecting on relationships, ND7 shared, "I have

lost touch with all except for two and all we do is mail Christmas cards to each other, Christmas letters.”

Many shared they met their best friend while attending the university and they still regularly get together with friends from college with. D12 shared about his relationships from college:

I met a lot of good people, some of them are still my best friends. We get that group, we get together once every couple of months for breakfast. Strong relationships, tremendous respect for each other. I have a lot of these guys on e-mail system and we talk e-mails back and forth. Keep up. When a spouse dies or a parent, these guys all know about it and respond accordingly. I built lifelong friendships. Our kids have grown up together. We get together at Chiefs games, we get together at different events, it's always a special time. The relationship I had with former students is outstanding. I developed lifelong friends.

ND11 shared a similar experience with her friendships

We had two gals already die, but there were about ten from the time we were say Seniors, we would have dinner together when we came back to Kansas City, even though we all went to school there. And then from there we get together, the ten of us have gotten together every other year since we have graduated. Somewhere around the United States. Because one person lives in Fort Myer, one lives right out of Chicago, three live in Kansas City, one lives in Columbia, one lives in Denver and I'm the farthest west. So, when we first started, we would go to each other's locations. And do things around there and then we branched out. At the end of our trip we vote on where we wanted to go the following trip in two years, because every year would be too often.

Several participants talked of creating and maintaining professional relationships and personal relationships. These were people that were friends in the classroom, but they did not hang out with socially. These relationships translated in a similar way to their professional lives. ND13 talked about the different relationships:

So, you know, we did a lot of social things. I had a lot of friends who were academic friends. Who you know, we shared notes, we made sure we knew what was going on in class. We did a lot of information



sharing. But we didn't do things at night, ever. But during the day we were together all day you know, and shared a lot with. I had one good friend, and she and I keep in really close contact and talk a lot. We do dinner every now and then, but a lot of it, you know is "How's your job going?" and stuff like that. A lot of it is not academic now, but it is still professional relationship.

AB8 talked about peer relationships translating to professional relationships

The group of us that all student taught that same spring back in 1974 in the business education department, we still see each other, we still communicate, Christmas cards, things like that. When we were, we started out in little Missouri High Schools in this area and gradually moved to a bigger school, and if a job opening came up in our school that one of them could fit in to we were always communicating.

### *Social Networking*

Facebook seems to have really re-connected a lot of alumni. Many of them are finding each other on Facebook, and taking that opportunity to re-connect and then meet in person. Several interview participants brought up re-connecting with friends over Facebook. Some indicated that it was on a more superficial level. D7 commented, "A lot of it is just Facebook, kind of like e-mail. Talking about our families. A trip here and there. Anyway you know, nothing." One participant shared how she re-connected with friends over Facebook and that motivated them to all get together for a reunion. D15 shared:

One of the guys I went to school with in my same program, and we recently found each other on facebook. So we have been chatting and he came to [town] a couple of weeks ago so we hooked up and hung out for a day. I also had a group of friends that got together in Kansas City about two months ago. We all, we were all kind of roommates or hall mates. We all still keep in touch. We got each other all on Facebook probably six, eight months ago. Yeah, so we are all catching back up again.

AB4 shared about reconnecting a group that is no longer on campus, “The sorority I was in, in college is no longer on campus, but we have our own Facebook page and we are planning a reunion next year.”

Several commented that by reconnecting with old friends over Facebook, it was like reconnecting with the institution. As they have begun rebuilding their relationships they are talking about their time on campus and reaching out to others as well as making plans to visit campus.

### *Impact of Long-Term Relationships*

Long term relationships appear to be key in long term connection to the university. Those who had maintained a long term relationship with peers or faculty were more likely to be providing financial support to the institution or to give of their time in a volunteer capacity. This became evident in both the focus groups and the individual interviews. AB6 talked about relationships in this way:

You know when we talk about relationships, there are two things that we are really kind of looking at I think. One is the relationships that we had with our peers, and one is the relationships we had with the faculty, staff. I can say that, you know, my friends here have become my lifetime friends, and there are still those connections whether you were in the Greek system or you weren't in the Greek system. If you're not in the Greek system it seems though maybe that network of friends may be a little bit smaller but it's just as important and just as strong.

FB4 discussed relationships and community, and how those connections come back around for additional involvement:

You have the relationship as a community and then you say all of these relationships together makes your experience and then individual relationships you form with specific faculty or your fraternity brothers or your dorm mates or intramural players or whatever it is then you stay in touch with them and years later many of them are on a board or other organizations with you.

The importance of relationships to remaining connected to the institution or becoming reconnected to the institution was clear in D13's comments:

That is kind of the connection you have with the school is the friends you make, and stuff like that. It kind of keeps that part of the school alive so to speak, and you can kind of keep remembering stuff like that. My understanding is it's all about relationships. If you didn't have any relationships that formed while you were in school then it's going to be really tough to get re-energized back. If I didn't go back with my buddies, I wouldn't go by myself, and most people are like that.

### Alumni Experience

To assess participants' experiences and relationship with the institution, questions were asked about their alumni experience, views on alumni support and its' need, their connection with the institution, how they currently feel about the institution, and if they feel their relationship with the institution has changed over time. There were also questions posed about what they knew about alumni while they were still students. Focus group participants discussed the types of connections alumni have to the institution, what alumni are concerned about related to the institution, and why alumni choose to support the institution.

#### *Student Knowledge of Alumni and Support*

Less than half of those interviewed and only one or two in each focus group were aware of the alumni association when they were students. In most cases those who were aware of the alumni association knew little or nothing about it. A few who worked in the alumni office or were involved in an organization on campus that had active alumni involvement had a good understanding of what it meant to be an alumnus and give back.

Several indicated they did not know anything about alumni or the alumni association. D11 commented, "Well if there was an Alumni, I really didn't, I wasn't

conscious of it, let's put it that way.” ND3 shared a similar sentiment, “There wasn't a concern at that time, and that may have been my own not looking far enough in the future or whatever. You know, I was more concerned with the day-to-day and that kind of thing.”

Most were aware of alumni and the alumni association, but knew very little other than they existed, and that they would one day graduate and become an alumnus of the institution. D7 commented, “Not a whole lot, I just knew they existed.” Several indicated that they knew of a building or an office. AB6 reflected, “You know I saw the facility, and if I remember right it was across the street in what is now the parking lot, if I remember right, and I remember seeing it and thinking someday I'll belong to that, but I had no idea what it was.”

A few participants mentioned being aware of alumni on campus at Homecoming and them being introduced at sporting events, or having their own gatherings elsewhere.

ND13 shared:

Isn't that terrible. I don't remember, I do remember Alumni always having a big tent at the Homecoming thing. And the only thing that I remember as a student was that they had free food and you couldn't go over there and eat. Like, don't go over there because that is for Alumni. I mean that is the only thing I really remember. And I remember at some of the sporting events where they would recognize some of the different Alumni.

Several participants had interactions with alumni while they were students and this gave them an understanding of alumni and the role they as an individual would continue to play in the campus community following graduation. D3 shared this experience:

Well the Band Alumni Association is very active and I got their scholarship a couple times. It was all about them and them being at Homecoming every year. They made a big deal, well I don't know what

they do now, they use be on the field with the band at half-time. Then as Ambassadors we did phone calls for the Development Office there. So I think as an undergrad, and probably more so than most of my peers. I knew this was something that we need to do. We need to have alums be connected, because they give us scholarships. They give us money. And they are a big part of the greater campus community. So, I think I left with the concept that it was important to give back. And I think my mom had something to do with that too. Because she had stayed connected as an alum.

Several also indicated that alumni were there to provide financial support and they knew they would be asked for financial support for the institution down the road. ND5 illustrated that with his comment, “Alumni were people who went to school and got out, and the Alumni Association was folks who had money that they had generated from their employment probably with the assistance of their education and they gave it back to the school.”

Only two or three indicated that as a student they had considered giving back to the institution after graduation. It was never considered or never occurred to most of the participants that they might give back to their alma mater in some way later in life. When asked if she had considered giving back, D15 shared:

When you're a student you don't think much about giving back. All you think is “How am I going to make it? How am I going to pay my bills?” I didn't think a lot about giving back. It's only after you've graduated and it's only been probably in the past, I don't know, probably five years that I have been thinking a lot about it.

D5 shared a similar sentiment:

It never crossed my mind because I think that, as I mentioned, my economic background was poor so I just never realized people had money. And that may sound silly, but the town in which I was raised and the way in which I was raised, the concept that people would have anything to give besides to give besides what goes to church on Sunday, I just, no, I would never have thought of that at all.

D9 shared her mindset when she was a student, she volunteered, but even in that process did not ever consider volunteering to assist the institution:

I can't think of any instances where that really crossed my mind. I was probably at that point still really selfish. You know, I liked to give back as far as, I enjoyed community work and I had done volunteer things, so giving back to the world as far as volunteering that was always something that I was into. But I don't know that I ever, ever even considered giving back to the school.

Only one donor shared that he had considered giving back to the institution following graduation. D10 shared, "Yeah, absolutely. I knew that, by the time I got to be a junior or senior, you know, you can kind of see the end of the road. I saw the value of the university and thought someday you know I'd like to, you know, be a contributor somehow."

The focus groups discussed that when a student was still in school they were not thinking any further ahead than graduation. FB1 commented, "They haven't thought that far yet. They're just worried about getting out of here." FB4 went further and stated, "All I would say is that everything was about getting out of school and nothing enters other than graduation other than maybe the week before being handed t-shirts that say alumni association and them saying wait a minute, there is life after this, but until then their focus is graduation and getting a job."

### *Experience as an Alumnus*

When asked about their experiences as alumni, interview participants talked about not being involved, receiving the alumni magazine and e-newsletter, attending regional events, returning to campus for Homecoming and being asked for money. A majority expressed having little or minimal involvement. One participant shared only recently beginning to receive information from the university. ND8 shared, "I just started like two

years ago, even being sent the newsletter, so I mean I never really received anything.”

ND10 commented on the minimal involvement he has had, “I really, other than it being on my resume, that's pretty much the only experience I have had with it.”

Most commented about receiving communication from the university in the form of the alumni magazine or the e-newsletter, sharing this was their main connection with the institution. ND6 commented:

Yeah, I haven't had too much interaction because it is kind of a regional school and where I went to is pretty far away. But I really enjoy getting the newsletters. I like reading through those. I've definitely been connected a little bit but I just think my situation is a little bit different than if I would have still been in Missouri. I still, keep in touch with friends and I think that keeps me connected to the school, too.

D15 also shared about the newsletter keeping her connected, but also reconnecting her with friends. “I started getting the newsletter. And so that's when I started reading and checking through it and seeing what else was going on and that's just kind of how it all materialized. Yeah it's so funny because that's how, the people that I finally found, that's how they knew where I was because of an article in the Today Magazine.”

Several mentioned receiving invitations to reunions and attending reunions. ND7 shared, “I don't feel like I have any connection. The only connection that stands up is that there have been reunions for my sorority that I really felt like I would like to go back to. But it's the timing of the year.” ND11 reflected on returning to campus for a reunion, “It was just like old home week, with all the people that were there, even though they looked different. It revived all of us, all the feelings.”

Others indicated participating in events and attending Homecoming. ND3 shared, “Well my experiences relate to Homecoming. I like to get down to Homecoming almost every year if I can.” D3 talked about her alumni involvement and regional events:

I never really spent much time living close by. But once I moved to California, it became a much more limited thing of reading the alumni news on a regular interval and then staying caught up with friends and trying to save up enough money to come back for Homecoming someday. And so what's been good in the last ten years or so everything has become so much easier because of on-line and being able to e-mail and read web-newsletters and things like that. Now that I think about when I was in Los Angeles, I did go to an Alumni event held in Riverside at, I think an old train station. I was there for that one and that kind of set me on a, as I'm able, wanting to go to the Alumni events because I had a great time at that, and I had a wonderful time at every one of them.

Several talked about where they are regionally located in relation to campus and how that impacts their involvement. D5 reflected:

My time there had a great deal to establish what eventually happened in my life. I essentially lived in Kansas City for a while, and had a, oh I'd call it a modest relationship with the university. I didn't go back as much as I thought that I would. And then in the end of the 80's when I moved to the east coast I really kind of lost contact with the university almost all together until a couple of years ago. My experience as an Alumnus was for years and years and years very distant and disconnected. I don't really know how to explain that. I mean geography has been one part of that. Because for what, for almost thirty years I have been out in the east, and you know, the athletic teams, whatever, very seldom come to where I live and play. I lost total communication. I occasionally get a publication in the mail. I might check it for ten minutes to look at the year of my graduating class to see if anyone died or got a job or anything like that. Other than that, there really was no connection. There was no use for it.

Multiple non-donors talked about only hearing from the institution to be asked from money. ND 5 stated, “I get called every quarter to give money. That's about it,” and ND14 commented, “once in a blue moon I'll hear from somebody either trying to get a



donation or something, that's about it.” Interestingly, when asked if they receive the quarterly magazine, these same participants answered in the affirmative.

### *Motivation to Get Involved*

Interview participants who are involved as alumni with the institution and focus group participants cited the two biggest reasons they became involved with the institution were they wanted to give back to something that had given them so much, and that someone has asked them to be a become involved. D12 commented:

What caused me to get involved? It was just a way to give back. That is probably the biggest reason. It was a very personal decision for me to try and help other kids like me, going to school with limited preparation, limited money. All of it was part of trying to give back and help other kids that had some of the same challenges I had to go to school.

Two participants indicated that they had become re-engaged with the institution because their spouses had been asked to hold leadership positions, and that had brought them back as a couple. D6 shared, “really my involvement with anything was after my husband became involved when he was asked to join the foundation and became a member of that. Then, as a couple we got involved.”

Almost every focus group participant had a story to share about a person contacting them to serve, and because those people asked they became reengaged and involved. AB4 shared, “I saw change occurring, positive change, and received a call asking me to become involved and it was something that I wanted to be a part of.” AB7 shared that a former alumni board president contacted her, “He’s a former student of mine and he called and visited with me about it. He made it sound exciting and talked about the changes going on. It was a way to get reconnected.” Many of these people were asked to be involved due to other involvement such as attending events, or returning to

campus. FB3 commented, "I've always been very active ever since I graduated. I was in a very active fraternity and my wife was in an active sorority so we came down to Homecoming just about every year and it just became part of what we did and I was asked to serve." FB7 summed up the motivation to serve, "This is home, I love this place having grown up here. I was approached and I think that is probably what we all have in common is being approached to serve. This is home and I want to give back."

#### *Connection to the University*

Twenty percent of those interviewed indicated that they currently have no connection to the university. Most of those were non-donors. When asked about her connection, ND8 said, "currently not really, not at all," and ND4 said, "I have a very slight connection to be honest."

Forty percent indicated they currently felt connected to a particular part of the institution. Parts of the institution that people indicated that they felt connected to included academic programs, student groups including Greek life, and athletics. D3 declared, "I definitely feel more connected to the music program than anywhere else. When I read the Alumni news, that's what I'm looking for you know, like what are the music professors doing? What awards have they gotten or places have they performed." D15 indicated, "I would probably say more just the Biology Department, because if I were to go back and try to connect back up that would be where I would head," and D7 shared, "maybe it's bad to say but maybe more to the baseball part of it. It's just something that took up three plus years of my life and I enjoyed every minute of it."

Forty percent indicated they felt connected to the institution as a whole. Interestingly a majority of those who felt connected to the institution as a whole are

non-donors. D2 shared:

I have always considered myself to be a product of the institution and proudly so. I've always wanted the university to do well. I have always been proud that I went there and that my loyalty is with the university, I have always been very consciousness of what the institution has done for me. The university has always been a big deal to me.

ND15 shared:

I think I have a connection to the university as a whole. In terms that there is a certain amount of pride for the Institution and what it has become. And, like I say, I value the education I received more now than I did then. And I can see that the skills that I picked up there and the knowledge that I picked up there have served me well in my career.

ND6 shared that he keeps up with the institution as a whole, not just one particular area, "I think I feel connected as a whole. I followed the President search, so I was still involved there. I follow the university as a whole rather than a specific part." D9 indicated that her husband becoming more involved is what had created a feeling of being connected to the institution as a whole:

I feel connected to the university, I think more as a whole now, but only because of our involvement with the Foundation. If it weren't for that, I would feel connected to the university through the Wrestling Program. As far as feel the connections through my own nature, I really have to say that I feel no connection at all.

D5 indicated that he had been connected to a particular part, but has discovered that is changing and he is becoming interested in the institution as a whole:

My pedigree there, as you know, is in the Athletic Department. And the Athletic Department is a very seeded thing to grab on to. It's high profile, there's games to go to or to watch and so I am attached to that. But I do find myself having some interest today in other things that the university does as well. Today as an example, an associate of mine, he is taking his daughter out to a college this month. Of course where I live everybody goes to Syracuse and Cornell, schools in the east. So I asked, "what is her interest in a degree program?" and he said "Criminal Justice." I immediately went back to the website and

got information about this institution. Now, will she go there? No, but my thought process was enough to know “Hey, there's a good program there and you never ever know.” I find my interest about the university and what it does are wider than they use to be.

When the focus groups were asked if they thought alumni were connected to a particular part of the institution or to the institution as a whole it was decided that it depended on each person's experience, “Yeah, I think it depends on the person but I also think it depends on the experience” (AB1). AB2 confided, “I will probably always just be more loyal to a particular aspect that I gained at this university, like Greek life, I will probably always be more loyal there than I will be to the university as a whole, but that is partly because I spent all my time and energy and activity around that one particular organization or group and school was kind of secondary.”

### *Support*

All of the donors and three non-donors indicated that, yes, they did support the institution. When interview participants were asked if they support the university, nearly all respondents first thought in regards to support focused on financial support. Other types of support did not seem to occur to interview participants until they were prompted. Even when prompted it appeared that those who supported financially were also more likely to support the institution in other ways.

Ways in which alumni indicated they support the institution included financial, promoting the institution, hiring graduates, attending events, volunteering time, and wearing institution gear. The focus groups came to the same conclusions that the interview participants shared. FB1 summarized, “alumni can support the institution financially, in experience, in real world knowledge that can be shared back in the

classroom, connections in utilizing some of the connections that can be developed out in the world to help bring assets or other things, or in recruitment.”

Promoting the university was something that came up with interview participants as well as the focus groups. D1 shared that she promotes the education she received to anyone who asks:

I've given the university credit any time someone has said, "How is it you know this." I say well I learned this at the school I went to. I've recommended others who wanted to do a degree in something that I would know a little bit about, and I would know something about the program here. I have recommended it to them. Actually quite a few people know that I think about it.

D8 shared, "I do really try to promote the university as a great place for education particularly. I'm not that familiar with the other programs on campus, but I am with the Education Department, and so I have stressed to them things are changing, there's really been a new excitement and changes there that are positive."

Some participants indicated volunteering as a way they support the institution. Ways they volunteer include speaking in classes, serving on committees and advisory boards, volunteering with organizations they were involved with as students, and supporting the alumni office in planning events. ND14 shared that he volunteers with his fraternity, but would like to do more. "I've been trying to do more, I want to try to do more with them because the Alumni are very active helping the chapter and guiding the chapter even in directions we never got when we were actives." ND11 shared how she assisted with contacting alumni who lived near her to encourage them to attend an alumni event. "I remember when they were having an alumni event out here, I made calls. They hadn't heard from some of the people and I said, just give me some of their names and

they gave me a list and I called all the people on the list. We got a few of the people to go. I hope that helped out. I thought it did.”

Several alumni indicated that they try to attend the career days on campus and promote hiring graduates within their company. “I come back to the university to try to recruit interns and full-time employees from the university whenever I can” (D10).

A few alumni indicated attending events as a way they support the institution. D3 talked about an alumni event she and her husband attended in New York, “We try to go to events when we can. We got to go to one in New York City because the band was playing at Carnegie Hall. We attended the concert and then went to the Alumni Event that was held that same day.” D13 shared that he and his buddies make a point to attend a couple of football games each year. “We try to get to a football game, one or two every year pretty much if we can make it, my two buddies, and anyone else we can find to go.”

Only a few participants indicated wearing university logoed apparel as a show of support for the institution. When asked, all participants indicated they owned and wore apparel from the institution. When asked, ND1 exclaimed, “I definitely wear my sweatshirt. I love it.” ND4 shared he has degrees from multiple institutions but the only class ring he wears is the one from this institution, “I’ll tell you that the only ring I wear on my right hand is my campus ring, because that means the most to me. It’s where I went on campus. So, yeah I still am proud of that.”

All of the donors indicated that they made financial contributions to the institution and several non-donors indicated that the university was a part of their estate planning. Most donors indicated they wished they could give more and about half of the non-donors indicated they hoped to be able to give in the future. ND8 commented, “Yeah, I

would love to give, you know, circumstances right now don't allow it. You know hopefully in the future my situation will change.”

Several donors indicated they give on a regular basis throughout the year to support the institution. D15 shared, “I give, every time they send me something I usually try to give them twenty-five bucks or fifty bucks or something like that.” D3 commented, “I have an automatic amount of money every month that goes. I don't even remember how much it is to be honest. It just automatically comes out of my bank account and goes to you every year, every month.”

Several donors also indicated that they have endowed scholarships to generate long term support for students. They continue to give to these to build up the endowment. D5 shared, “The most predominant way I support the institution is my wife and I endowed a scholarship. I would call it modest, but a scholarship that allows a student to have a modest stipend and also arranges for that student to work in the Athletic Department, much as I did when I was there.” D11 commented, “Well, I support the university as best I can. I started three scholarships and I try to give back to the foundation and I try to give back to as many things as I can and encourage other people to as well.

When asked what motivated alumni to support their alma mater, several talked about the example that was set and wanting to repay the institution for what it had done for them. D3 shared why she supports the institution:

Well having a good experience definitely helped. And even thinking it was such a meaningful time in my life, this place really set me up for success. I think that really makes me want to be a part of it. When I got that Alumni scholarship, I consciously remember thinking, “When I have the money, I need to do the same thing.” I have far and away paid back multiple times the scholarships that I have received, but it

was just really important to me to make sure they could keep doing that for future students.

ND12 commented, “I appreciate the university, it changed my life. If I hadn't went to the university then I would not have had the wonderful career I had.” D12 realized that as his career advanced he began to understand how much the institution had done for him.

“After a period of time I started thinking about how I could repay the people that helped me, both in the community and on the campus. As I advanced in my career I began to understand how much had been done for me, and that somehow I needed to give back.”

D5 commented on his reasons for starting a scholarship:

I'm not sure that I can really point at one thing that led to it, other than it was the right things to do. For the first time I was forced in my own mind to stop and think what contribution that the university had made to my ability to be able to go on in my life and do other things. And I realized that it was, if you will, about time and it was just the right thing to do.

Most focus group participants believed that alumni were motivated to give based on their undergraduate experience. AB6 stated:

I think it starts your freshman year with those friends that you start out with. That is that line that connects us all together. Then it moves into the classrooms with the professors that make you realize this is now your home as well. And then later on, I think we kind of leave and maybe this is kind of a trend, we disappear for a few years and then all of a sudden we are then drawn back because of those friends, because of those professors. When I step foot on this campus it's like coming home. I think that's the important piece, it's still home.

Other focus group participants thought that alumni give because they have been successful and are now ready to repay the institution. AB8 shared:

To give monetarily it's I have achieved. I have raised my family. I've gotten them through college. I could not have done what I've done without my college degree. So I'm at the point in my life, if I can help some other person that needs some extra money to get that scholarship



or something, now is my time to give back a little bit of that. My monetary needs are not as great as they used to be.

The Foundation Board focus group believed a major component of give is being asked. FB1 shared, “I didn’t give, didn’t think of giving for several years after I graduated, but it was the persistency of getting tapped on the shoulder getting a phone call, hi I’m with ... so I eventually started giving.”

A majority of those interviewed do not think that alumni understand why support to their Alma mater is important. ND13 shared:

I think yes and no. I think if people stop and read the publications that they get, they do see that it's growing. I think also, though, that people really take on their community. So, if they live somewhere else, their giving back money goes to their community. Now, that doesn't mean when somebody says “Hey, I'm going there” they don't say “Oh great, that's a great school, I went to school there.” They don't say that, but, they really get other things that go on. Where as people that live here, we still see it, it's in our public eye every day. But I think yes and no.

D5 commented that he does not know that he is aware of why alumni support to his alma mater is important. He just feels it is the right thing to do:

No, I don't think they do and I don't mind saying to you I'm not even sure that I can say why it is. I don't think I thought about why it was important. I think the thought I had at the time was, and probably this moment, is that I can help a student who might be in the same situation I was in going to college and have some economic assistance. That would be the central reason why I thought about doing it.

When asked the question about alumni support being important, ND7 illustrated that she did not understand why it is important by stating:

I'm surprised to get phone calls from people asking for support because I think it is public education and it is being supported. I don't see why people would support the institution unless they are multimillionaires and graduates of the school and want to help the school out. That would be the only reason why I think the average person would support public institutions. I would be surprised if people would support the institution unless they had no life and don't support anything else.

Members of both focus groups do not believe that alumni understand why support of their alma mater is important. Many thought alumni “still think that the state pays for it” (FB8). AB3 stated, “Overall I don’t think that the average alumnus realizes what their participation back with the university would mean.” AB6 went on to theorize:

I think there are two types of alumni. I think there are those alum that feel like they bought a commodity and they are done, like the person that goes to the gas station and they fill up their car and they leave and there is not loyalty to the station. There is the alum that they walk out of here and they are really connected and as their life progresses they just give and they give and they give. I think the majority of our alum just don’t understand it, they don’t know. I really think there are those three types, and we will probably continue to run into all three types.

### *Philanthropic Tendencies*

The focus groups discussed how philanthropic tendencies are formed and if the institution can impact the formation of such tendencies. Overall the groups believed those tendencies started at home. FB7 commented, “One would be what we see from our parents. What’s modeled at home. I’m not going to speak for anyone else, but what I saw from my parents shaped my behavior later on down the road whether it be tithing at church or giving to the university or organizations around town.” There was some discussion related to nature versus nurture, and it was agreed that, “you either like giving or you don’t like giving” (FB8). FB2 commented further, “I think it’s something inside of you too. It’s self fulfilling when it’s a need of your own, too, it’s like you feel you need to be helping other people.”

In discussing if the institution could have an impact on creating philanthropic tendencies, the general consensus was yes. FB4 shared, “I think we play a big role, I think it starts at home but just like anything with your initial experience, if it’s not

nurtured and raised and given chances and whatever organization we do fundraisers or service etc and that got you involved.” There was further discussion about the expectation and how that is conveyed and whether or not the institution is welcoming to alumni and alumni support. During the discussion it was mentioned that several past leaders of the institution were not interested in alumni or their support and for that reason many alumni have not returned to campus or provided financial contributions to the institution. FB5 shared that under one president’s leadership that attitude was, “you’re done, get out, we don’t want to ever see you again.”

#### *Current Likes and Concerns*

When participants were asked what they currently like about the institution there were two primary answers. Alumni shared they liked the campus and community, and they believe the institution is moving in a positive direction. In talking about the campus, ND12 shared:

It is a small, friendly, campus. It has good location, good logistics. The people there are bright, intelligent. I'm impressed with the diversity. Not a lot, you know, some of the universities are so cost prohibitive it's not open to a diverse set of people. So if I had to say, that would probably be an important part of the campus there too. I like seeing people from all nations and all ethnic groups going to school. It's, college is everything.

D4 also reflected on the campus:

I just enjoy the ambiance and the times that we come back, it is just nice to be able to walk around, see what's happened. The changes for the better, I think that is probably one of the best ones. How they have enhanced the academics. I was very impressed with the Library while we were there on one of our recent trips. And, it just it looks like a fine institution.

The focus groups discussed what was currently important to alumni and the consensus was “it’s important that the level of education remains high. I mean as alumni

we want students all to succeed, the institution to succeed” (FB2). These seem to be in line with what most alumni currently like about the institution. D9 shared:

I really like the energy that I see there. And it’s kind of strange because again I don't really have a lot of connection with the students that are there now. But it just seems like the university has a lot of energy and a lot of things going for it. When we get the publications, even that Alumni publication, I am just blown away by what is being accomplished there.

D13 went on to say, “I think it would be the fact that they have really taken the steps to move out and have gotten more publicity, more name recognition a little more aggressive with the campaign to get the word out. To let people know that if they came there they would get a good education and a good experience there.” ND3 even discussed the role the institution is playing to meet the changing societal demands:

Well it is always growing and it is in a state of expansion and I don't mean population wise. I mean as far as the changes happening in society is shifting to meet the challenges of those changes but still not being there and not being that closely connected at this point. But it, to me, it looks to me like it still has the anchor that it had when I was there. You know, with its academic focus and things like that but it also has expanded programs and opportunities for students relative to the structural shifts occurring in our society.

One other sentiment that was shared is that alumni “like how the university is being more communicative to those of us who have graduated, and being involved and trying to get people together” (ND8).

During focus group discussions it was determined that alumni are most concerned about bad press for the institution. This same sentiment came out clearly from the interview participants. While many of those indicated that there is nothing they are currently concerned about in regards to the institution, the second most common response was bad press. ND12 commented:

I guess occasionally, and this really isn't the university's fault, the media gets something and blows it up. And I think, I guess that's not even the university, maybe I'm just mad at the media. I guess, and those things happen. I don't think it's fair to, I mean it's not fair to hold it against the university.

D13 also shared his disappointment in politics occurring at the university being aired in the media, “I think there was some negative politics, which is as it is in life, you can’t get away from it. You know politics in the global setting. There were things going on, but it seemed like some of it got run through the papers more than it needed to be I guess.”

#### *Relationship with the Institution over Time*

When asked about how participants think their relationship with the institution will change over time or has changed over time, several commented that they did not believe it had changed, or would change at all. Many, however, talked about where they are in their life and how that impacts their relationship with the institution. Several indicated they have children at home and raising them takes time. ND8 reflected, “you know, family life has kept me busy with three children, but I see as they get off to college, I see myself going back to the campus more often and getting involved.” ND14 shared a similar sentiment, “So with kids, you can spend lots of time with that. Hopefully when they get older and get out on their own, hopefully I'll have more time to get back in touch with the university.”

One participant talked about nearing the end of her career and how she feels she will have more time to be involved with the institution. D8 shared:

I'm on the downhill side of my career. Although I'm not ready to give up yet. And I still have some things that I want to get finished. But I realize that I am down to the last few years of my career. At that point though, I still think I have some things to offer. I want to continue working with the university, whether it be adjunct work or advisory board work or just whatever. I still want to contribute. I still want to

be a part of, we still, my husband and I still want to attend and participate in events and those kinds of things. But I think at that time in my career, in my life, actually I will have a little more time than what I have right now.

Many indicated that over time they believe they have become more appreciative of the institution and what it did for them. D15 shared, “I think initially I looked at it as just an education. It was just something that I had to do in order to get a good job and to move on. But now it's actually a part of me that made me who I am. So it's like, kind of like part of my soul. It's who I am. It made me the success that I am.” ND15 reflected:

Oh, you know again it just goes back to appreciating the university more over time. Probably, I'm not sure how this manifests itself, but I think I am just more interested in goings on in the university over time. If I were ever in a position to have excess money, which never happens, I would certainly you know, if I was going to give off philanthropy money I would certainly look to the university to do that with.

One interview participant really reflected on how his relationship with the institution has changed over time from when he first graduated to now in retirement. D13 shared:

Most people, when you are young, you get out of school and your relationships are still new, so you're probably going to go to some of the social function is pretty important. Once you get a family and you get a career going and it all adds up. It's a difficult time and not everybody. But typically in terms of the social benefit but you really got a lot on your plate. During that period is when you lose a little anyway. You probably lose sight of the school, probably not one of those things that high priorities. And then, that's what happened to me, once all the kids were grown up you are kind of out of that mode and you really have a little more time to go back and get reconnected again to the school.

Several interview participants who do not live in the area commented they think their relationship with the institution would change if they lived closer to the university.

D3 commented:

Well, if I ever live close enough, I will volunteer. In addition to the Alumni stuff I will volunteer in the music department. I would put time where my mouth is, in addition to just following what I read in the news and that sort of thing. But if I don't ever live close enough, because who knows where my career will take me, then I'll continue to do what I am doing. Give what I can, pay attention, attend the Alumni events in the area.

The focus groups discussed how the relationships alumni have with the institution change over time. They really believe the relationship is directly linked to where alumni are in their lives. AB6 talked about the cycle of life from graduation, starting a family, and deciding to give back or reconnect with the university:

You start in your twenties and you start this family and then one day, it's like a fog, and then one day you're walking out of the fog and your kid's leaving and you think, what happened to the last twenty-some years. I think that's kind of what happened is when you leave the college you get so involved in things and you're so involved with your family and life, you struggle those first few years. We're not known for having huge check books and you struggle and you struggle, and then when things start getting better, and you look back and think about the wonderful time and those friends, and you reconnect with those friends, and that is when you come home.

FB1 shared that as you get older you start to look back more fondly on the institution:

Some of us get a little bit more sentimental, you know we're kind of at a different stage in our lives and we've forgotten how tough that econ test was, that sort of thing and so we just kind of start reminiscing a little bit. I think it's easier to give not only because we are monetarily in a better place to be able to do it but we've grown up a little bit and we're feeling more important that we give back and share our good fortune.

Both focus groups talked about how the university can leave the door open so that when alumni hit that point in their life that they want to again become involved in the institution and give back, they can easily do so. FB7 emphasized, "That's why it's important to just keep the door open to all alumni as much as possible because you never know when that day is going to hit. We all hit it at different points in our lives, where we

want to start giving back, hitting it for the first time or in a bigger way.” Thinking about the demands that are placed on everyone’s time, AB6 commented, “That’s why I think in some respects the conversations we’re having now is how can we connect those people in their early twenties, mid-twenties, late twenties, early thirties, with just little things that don’t take a huge commitment, but keep them connected.”

#### Attachment

Interview participants were asked if they have an emotional attachment to the institution. If so they were asked why, when they think that formed, and what they believe impacted its formation. Focus group participants were asked similar questions.

When asked if they have an emotional attachment to the institution, all of the donors indicated yes, and twelve of the non-donors indicated they had an emotional attachment to the institution. D11 emphasized, “Oh yes I do, I really do. It's still home. It really is.” ND3 shared, “Yeah, the nostalgia I get when I go there or I think about it.” ND13 did not realize the attachment she had until she had an emotional reaction to a decision the school made:

I was glad that I came here and went to school. I probably didn't notice how much of an emotional attachment until the name change happened. I was like, really? Why are you changing the name? You don't have to change the name. Obviously I am or it wouldn't have bothered me if they changed the name.

Several participants indicated they do not have an emotional attachment to the institution. They believed that was because they were not involved in campus life or because they no longer lived nearby. ND 15 shared:

You know, it's not like I was someone who was an integral part of campus life when they were there and were involved in the student government and you know all the extra clubs and activities. I wasn't that type of student. I think I would have more of an emotional tie to



the university had I been that type of student. I regret that I wasn't that kind of student.

When asked what impacted the formation of this attachment to the institution, several categories of answers emerged: relationships, the overall experience and the foundation the institution provided for future success. In talking about relationships being what impacted their attachment to the institution, many shared that they met their best friend or their spouse at the institution. D8 exclaimed, "It's the friendships that I've formed." D3 believed it was "the people, the faculty that I knew so well and that were so caring of me, and the friends that I made and all the changes that were going on in my life and everything that I was learning at the time."

Many talked about the overall experience they had on campus, the people, and experiences both in and out of the classroom. ND2 shared:

Probably my experience here. If I didn't have a good experience here I could probably care less. I know that there's different people that are like that. They come here to go to school and that is it. I came here to get an education but I came here to also find lifelong friends. I came here to start a career. You know I was looking at it as a different way than just taking classes.

A majority indicated the success they have experienced since graduation fostered their feelings of attachment. They thought the institution provided them with the foundation to succeed. ND14 shared, "It was such an important part of my life. I feel like it's a foundation that will always be there." ND11 shared a similar sentiment, "Well, because it just affected my life in such a positive way and did so much for me." ND 9 when on further to say, "I just feel like without the university and the experience I had there I might not be where I am right now in my life."

### *Attachment Formation*

When participants were asked when their attachment formed, there were three different answers. Those who had parents or other family attend the university or had grown up in the community all thought they were attached to the institution prior to enrolling. D11 shared, “In a way I think it may have started in part, when my brother was working on his degree.” D2, who grew up in the community, commented, “Before I went to school. I mean, as a kid in town going on the college camps, going to see the Mules games. It was just exciting. I mean, it was great stuff, so how could anybody want to go anywhere else?”

A majority of the participants indicated that their attachment formed while they were students. Many indicated their attachment began when they arrived on campus. ND 8 commented, “I think just right away I got attached. It just felt comfortable.” D12 shared, “It was progression. I think it started once I arrived.” ND1 elaborated, “I would imagine it probably started from the first day that I got there, and I would imagine that it really solidified by the second year. You know because in the beginning you are still pretty new and you don't really know, but then the second year you are pretty confident.”

Several indicated their attachment formed during their second and third year on campus. ND6 shared that he started feeling attached, “Probably when I started getting involved. So, I don't think it happened right away. I'm pretty sure it started happening when I started getting more involved, meeting more people.” ND2 commented, “I would say my sophomore and junior year. My freshman year I was still like getting over the whole being away from home, being on my own, so that was a big difference. But

sophomore year and junior year was probably when I was like, okay, I can call this home.”

D3 shared:

I think probably junior or senior year. That's where I really started heading that way. Until then I was, it was just a struggle to keep up, but I, once I hit around my junior year I honed in on exactly what my major was going to be, taking a leadership position in the department. So I think that once I started having some positions where I was leading, it really helped me realize that “Wow, I really had learned something. I'm a different person that when I arrived on campus I have gotten somewhere and there is a lot more I have to do. But I now know what I want to do.”

Several indicated that their attachment formed following graduation when they realized the impact the institution had on them. ND3 shared, “In the moment I probably wasn't aware, but as I got into my career and began to feel comfortable that I had been well prepared for the career I was into. I think in retrospect I was able to see it more clearly.” D15 commented:

Probably like after I left. You know when I was there I was focused on getting through school and all of that. And then once I left I realized that you know, I was here. And I'm here because I received an education. And I can do it even though people didn't think we could. Just because your parents didn't go to school doesn't mean that that should stop you from going to school. So. I think it was all, the perspective after your done and you're out and you're actually living your life you look back and you say “Wow, this isn't just part of my life.”

### Loyalty

Each participant was asked to define loyalty in an attempt to better understand alumni perception of loyalty. They were then asked if they considered themselves loyal alumni and what traits are exhibited by a loyal alumnus. Focus group participants were asked similar questions.

When participants were asked if they were a loyal alumnus, all of the donors and ten of the non-donors indicated yes. Some of the explanations given for why they are

loyal included being satisfied with their education, being willing to give back to the institution, and being willing to defend it. D1 shared, “considering the great satisfaction that I had with my education and the experiences here.” D10 commented, “I am willing to give of my time and treasures to the university if called upon.” D9 went on to say, “If someone were to say, in their opinion the university was an inferior institution, I would defend that vehemently.”

Some participants referred to the institution as an old friend. When asked if she was loyal D6 responded, “I certainly try to be. I never forget a lot of things, but if you've been a friend to me once you're gonna be a friend forever so far as I'm concerned. Good and bad.”

Donors all saw themselves as actively involved and engaged with the university. Some of the non-donors were hesitant to characterize themselves as engaged, but in some cases it was indicated that they were loyal in a non-practicing or non-involved way. ND3 stated, “I would describe myself as a loyal alumnus. An inactive, loyal alumnus, because I attend Homecoming, but as far as being very active I have not really.” ND15 shared a similar thought:

Yeah, you know in a pushy non-traditional, uninvolved kind of way. I'm interested in the university. When I see articles about it in the paper I read it. When I get the newsletters I go through it. Occasionally I see articles about people that attended there that I either know or didn't know, I had some sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Those who indicated they were not loyal did not feel they had a connection to the institution, although several did indicate that they had an emotional attachment. N1 shared, “I just haven't really stayed connected to the university in any way.” ND5

indicated, “The fact that given other opportunities of broader knowledge of the education system I probably would have gone somewhere else.”

### *Definition of Loyalty*

In asking for a definition of loyalty, interview participants provided thirty different definitions, but a majority had similar components and meanings. Key components that stood out included: (a) having an emotional attachment, caring and understanding. D1 stated, “loyalty is having allegiance to a person place or thing, having an emotional allegiance or attachment;” (b) being proud and protective of the institution, staying true even in the face of adversity. ND6 commented, “loyalty is staying true to someone or something through thick and thin;” (c) giving unconditional support, wanting to help and give back to see the institution succeed. D3 reflected, “It is wanting to help, wanting to give back to whatever, whether it's the institution, or friends or family or whatever. Wanting to make that sacrifice to help. Not just doing it, but actually be happy to do it;” and (d) mutual respect.

It is clear in the definitions participants provided that loyalty is mutual, not just one-sided. ND5 stated, “It’s a two way street. You know that you can count on someone to provide trust, confidence, and responsibility for you at the same time you owe them the same thing.”

The focus groups did not truly define loyalty but, rather, offered key words that they think are traits of loyalty: participation, trust, pride, finance, commitment, connection, and love. FB4 summed it up by stating, “I guess loyalty is that you’re not only participating and engaged, but you’re also recruiting others to be engaged, you’re an apostle, you’re out there selling others on why it’s such a great place.” FB1 followed up

on that comment by stating, “I think loyalty has to do with helping make the institution better, not necessarily what we get out of the institution but what can we do to help make it better all the time. I think that’s a sign of loyalty that you continue to try to improve it, not just walk away and I’m done.”

*Traits Loyal Alumni Exhibit*

When alumni were asked what traits a loyal alumnus would exhibit, three main ideas emerged. The first idea was “recommend and promote,” with half citing that as a trait. ND9 commented, “I think always being positive about your experiences there and wanting to make sure that people know about that school and what a great university it is.”

D13 shared:

One in particular is the fact that you provide a positive reflection on the school and when people ask where you went to school, when people are talking about going to school and be a supporter of the school, and be someone that talks positively and talks about their experience and relate it to others.

Support was the second idea that emerged. Many participants discussed supporting in a variety of ways such as offering time, resources and talent. D5 commented, “I think that there are a lot of things an Alumnus can do in a non-economic way. Economics are obvious. You can do what you do.” D10 shared:

I think loyal alumni are willing to promote the university formally and informally. I think that they're willing to give of their time and attend Alumni events, and if possible give money if they can. Some people just don't have it to give, they can't, if they have other talents and assets that they can give.

D8 had similar thoughts, “Speaking both in an encouraging and positive manner about the institution, university. The willingness to give time and resources. Whether that be

money, time, expertise, all of those things. The willingness to participate and be active in events and activities whenever possible.”

Over half of all those interviewed, and more non-donors than donors, indicated financial support as a way alumni exhibit loyalty toward their alma mater. ND5 stated:

Those are your alumni folks that get together and retain old friendships or new friendships based on the commonality of being a graduate. Provide funds to either particular departments or to the university in general. And usually have money set aside upon your death that will go to the benefit of the university.

The third idea that emerged was participating in activities and events. D12 commented, “participation of activities, staying informed about events, staying connected, becoming an active donor, either in time or resources.” ND15 shared:

Well, and you know I think a real loyal alumnus would probably participate, would go back to the school and participate in some alumni activity. A real loyal alumnus would probably find a way to give financially to some extent, and, you know, maybe participate in some of the local groups and organizations.

Few mentioned, but there were enough responses to note, that staying informed about the institution was a trait that loyal alumni would exhibit. ND12 shared, “I guess most of all it's being interested and knowing and understanding enough about what is going on in order to do things to help.” ND6 described it:

I think just staying up on things. Maybe not reading the newsletter every day, but just staying involved, knowing what's going on. Talking about it, you know, with our friends or whatever. If I was in Missouri I would definitely recommend that you, you know to friends and family. My little brother, I don't know if you know this, but went there for a little bit as well.

Interestingly, only two indicated that wearing or displaying institution symbols or gear would be traits a loyal alumnus would exhibit. D9 described it this way, “I'd say that a loyal alumnus is someone who flies a university flag in their front yard. Someone you

know, who has some bumper stickers of their alma matter on their car.” When participants were asked about wearing institution symbols and gear many indicated that they did.

### *Loyalty Formation*

The focus groups discussed when they think loyalty forms. There was not consensus; some believe that loyalty forms before ever attending the institution, while others believe it occurs during a student’s first two years at the institution.

Several focus group members thought that loyalty was a result of being a legacy and deciding to attend. FB2 stated, “If your parents went here you may already have loyalty to it.” FB5 commented, “I think a lot of it is going to be at the time you make the decision to attend.” AB5 also believed it occurred during the admissions process:

High School. I can tell you that because this was, my official visit, we were allowed one senior day for the seniors in high school to go visit. I was in southern Illinois. I came here because other seniors from my high school had come here before and came back with information, brochures, handouts, stories, they’d been recruited by the football coach. So when I visited I knew as soon as I saw this campus that I wanted to go here, so my loyalty started my senior year in high school.

Most focus group participants believed that loyalty was formed early during a student’s college career. AB8 shared, “I think it’s early success and early feeling of being part of something. It’s important that they feel, you felt, connected in that first week.”

AB6 commented:

I think it’s different for every person. For me it began that very first week that I was on campus. I walked out of high school where I was well liked and you had your group of friends or whatever and then all of a sudden I showed up on this campus. I loaded up my Volkswagen Beetle with all my prized possessions and drove down and carried all that stuff into my residence hall room and I looked around and knew no one. I thought what have I done, and you know there is this guy



that is going to be your roommate and he isn't there yet, and he's a senior. Then all of a sudden here come these guys up and down the hallway and pretty soon you're making new friends, pretty soon you're doing things together. I mean, that is when the loyalty kind of began to form. Then I walk in and here are these professors, and they care about you and they want you to do well and then you find yourself wanting to do well to please them, and I think the loyalty was a gradual thing that was sort of developing.

AB7 reflected, "I'm thinking it solidified for me going into my sophomore year because by that point I was going into my major classes. I had my friends that I made my freshman year and so coming back I was like whew, thank goodness I'm back and from that point on I really didn't want to go home."

### Summary

This study focused on the impact the undergraduate experience has on alumni loyalty, and how alumni view loyalty. The research was conducted at a mid-sized midwestern public institution.

Using qualitative analysis, data was collected through individual interviews and focus group discussions. The questions used were open-ended and semi-structured. All interviews and both focus groups were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using open and axial coding.

Data indicated that there are some differences between the donor and non-donor groups. Donors tended to have stronger relationships that were maintained over time, believed they had changed while attending the university, and thought their education had provided them a foundation for life. Donors tended to have more than one degree and more than degree from the same institution. Non-donors were overall positive, but seemed to not have the same investment in the institution, and had to rely more on loans to pay for their education. Views on loyalty were similar across both groups, but donors

indicated more of an attachment. Both groups believed that support was making a financial gift to the institution. The focus groups had similar beliefs as the interview participants, however they believed involvement was key to long term engagement, while involvement in both donor groups was consistent.

Chapter five includes the summary of findings focusing on themes that emerged and answers to the seven research questions that guided this study. Also included is discussion, implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

A priority for university administrators is keeping alumni connected to the institution after they graduate. By keeping alumni connected, they will feel good about their alma mater and hopefully contribute back through financial gifts or their time and talent. Alumni form their opinions of the institution when they are students, and those opinions continue after they graduate. Factors occurring while an alumnus was a student and factors following graduation have an impact on loyalty (Ridley & Boone, 2001).

With continued decreased funding in public higher education, there needs to be an increase in additional revenue streams of support. Increasing alumni giving and support is an option that could assist. Alumni are important to the continued health and prestige of an institution. To increase alumni support, institutions need to determine what motivates alumni to support their undergraduate institution. Studies show willingness to contribute is affected by undergraduate experiences (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Johnson & Eckel, 1998). While there are many factors occurring after graduation that contribute to alumni support, there are just as many, if not more, occurring while students are still on campus.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to create a better understanding of how the student experience shapes alumni loyalty and to determine when alumni loyalty is formed. Gaining a better understanding of alumni loyalty would be beneficial when evaluating alumni programs, as well as creating partnerships with other areas on campus that possibly impact the formation of loyalty. An understanding of how and when alumni

loyalty is formed could allow institutions to impact shaping it, which could contribute to future alumni support.

Multiple factors contribute to the development of alumni loyalty. If these factors are known, they can be used to shape the student experience and predict future alumni giving and involvement. The following questions guide this study:

1. How do alumni define loyalty?
2. How do alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater?
3. What undergraduate experiences impact long-term affiliation or disaffiliation with one's alma mater?
4. At what point does loyalty to one's alma mater form?
5. What impacts the formation of loyalty?
6. What can be done to improve the student experience to increase the chances of loyalty formation?
7. What motivates alumni to support, or inhibits them from supporting, their alma mater?

#### Design and Procedures

Data were collected for this study through thirty individual interviews (fifteen donors and fifteen non-donors) and two focus groups. In an effort to interview a cross section of the alumni base and ensure the two interview groups were comparable, the following criteria were used in determining the interview participants: graduation year, college from which their degree was received, and where they currently live. Each group had an equal balance of men and women with two to three graduates per decade from the 1950s through the 2000s. Each of the five academic colleges was represented with at least two participants. Nine in each group currently live in the state of Missouri and six in

each group are currently residing in other states. Information about each interview participant can be found in Appendix G.

The two focus groups were comprised of members from the university's Alumni Association Board of Directors and Foundation Board of Directors. The Alumni Association Board of Directors is made up of graduates of the university. It is an advisory board to the Office of Alumni Relations and represents the interests of all graduates of the university. The Foundation Board of Directors is made up of both alumni and donors to the university. They are responsible for the financial well being of the foundation. They determine the investments and policies that govern the daily operation of the foundation and its employees. Members of both boards are selected through a nominating committee and approved by the board as a whole.

The Alumni Association Board of Directors focus group included eight participants, three men and five women, with graduation years ranging from 1969 to 2000. Participants had served between one and six years on the board. The Foundation Board of Directors focus group included nine participants, six men and three women, with graduation years ranging from 1966 to 1980, and one non-degreed alumna, meaning that he or she has taken classes at the institution but has not completed a degree. Most participants had served on the board between one and eleven years, with one participant having been involved for 38 years. Additional information about the focus group participants can be found in Appendix G.

The focus of the questions used in the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups was not the same. Questions asked during the individual interviews focused on their experience as both a student and alumnus of the institution. The focus group questions

were more broad, asking for their views on alumni overall, not necessarily about their individual experiences.

Focus group and interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, to provide the best data for analysis (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Notes from the interviews and focus groups were shared with a few participants to conduct a “member check” where the researcher “provides data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, p. 204).

To ensure credibility in analysis of the data a two-part coding system was utilized, open and axial, to sort and assign categories to the data, making it manageable during the analysis process (Merriam, 1998). Open coding is the initial stage of selecting and naming categories through the analysis of the data. Variables were identified, labeled, categorized and related together in an outline form (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer, 2010). Axial coding is the next stage after open coding. In axial coding, data were put together in new ways to make explicit connections between categories and sub-categories in an effort to explain and understand relationships within the data to create a better understanding (Barker, Jones, Britton & Messer). Lastly, triangulation was utilized using multiple data sources. Interviews, focus groups and observation were used to establish validity of the data collected by comparing multiple sources of information to confirm emerging findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

### Emergent Themes

Throughout the research process the researcher analyzed data to uncover themes as they emerged. Themes emerged from responses shared during the individual

interviews and the focus group discussions. The three themes that emerged included the following: (a) relationships form long term connections; (b) cycle of life; and (c) transformational experience.

### *Relationships Form Long-Term Connections*

The first theme that emerged was that relationships are pivotal in forming long-term connections with the institution. Relationships formed during the undergraduate experience are a component of all memories of the institution, and keep alumni connected after graduation. Relationships are also the number one reason that alumni volunteer and support the institution. These relationships can be with peers, faculty or staff.

During the undergraduate experience, relationships appear to play a role in both the academic experience and the extracurricular experience. Relationships are what highlight memories of this time in their lives and impact how they view their experience. When asked what was gained from extracurricular activities, friendship was the number one response. D13 shared, “I met some guys, friends that are still pretty good friends.”

Those who have maintained deep meaningful relationships with their peers seem to be more connected to the institution. Long-term connections with peers included annual gatherings, reunions or trips, and regular contact either by phone, e-mail, or Facebook. D12 shared, “I met a lot of good people, some of them still my best friends. We get together once every couple of months. Strong relationships, tremendous respect for each other.” Many declared that they met their best friends as an undergraduate.

Faculty had an immense impact on the overall experience. Many attributed their academic experiences and what they learned to the faculty. D8 shared that she was “very challenged intellectually, stretched.” Respondents also believed that faculty took an

interest in them personally, were helpful and supportive. ND7 shared, “I remember being able to talk to faculty.” Several indicated that faculty were their role models and became their mentors, “I felt like I just had mentors everywhere” (D3). Focus group participants thought relationships that students formed with faculty played an important role in the student’s success. Many participants expressed an interest in re-connecting with faculty to tell them thank you.

Several participants and many focus group members shared stories about the impact faculty had on turning their life around. Faculty members took an interest in them and cared enough to have the tough conversations with them. These interventions had an impact and ultimately were the reason participants made different decisions and changed behaviors. D12 shared, “I realized that it takes time to stop and try and correct somebody.”

Overall, it does not appear to matter whether the relationship is maintained with faculty or peers; the important thing is that relationships are maintained. Those relationships appear to be the glue that keeps alumni connected to the institution. D13 reflected on it this way, “That is the connection you have with the school, the friends you make...If you didn’t have any relationship that formed while you were in school then it’s going to be really tough to get re-engaged back.”

Those who had maintained long-term relationships were more likely to provide financial support to the institution or serve as a volunteer. The number one reason that focus group participants gave for being involved is that someone asked them to be. That relationship and the simple act of being asked is what motivated them to volunteer with the institution. AB4 shared, “I received a call asking me to become involved and it was something that I wanted to be a part of.”



### *Cycle of Life*

The second theme that emerged was the cycle of life. Many alumni reflected on the transitions that occur in life and how those transitions impact their relationships and involvement with the institution. This cycle begins when they are students, then they graduate, start their career and family, and continue to move through life. Their relationship with their alma mater evolves during each stage. While many indicated that they were not aware of the life transitions while they were experiencing them, they are very clear, upon reflection, of their alumni experience and relationship with the institution.

While students, interview participants were not aware of the alumni association and the role an alumnus plays on campus. ND3 shared, “There wasn’t a concern at the time, and that may have been my not looking far enough in the future.” The focus group participants believe that students are not thinking any further ahead than graduation, “They haven’t thought that far yet; they’re just worried about getting out of here” (FB4).

Many alumni shared that other events occurring in their life impacted the relationship they had with the institution. Several indicated they had either just started their careers, were in graduate school, had young families, children in college, or were near the end of their career. ND8 commented, “Family life has kept me busy with three children.”

Several alumni discussed where they are regionally located in relation to campus and how that has impacted their involvement. They believe that living further away has made it harder to remain involved in the institution. These participants shared that down

the road they might end up living closer to the institution and that would allow them to be more involved. D3 shared, “If I ever live close enough, I will volunteer.”

Participants believed that at different points in their life they would become more involved in the institution. These points appeared to be when their children were out of the house and on their own and when the alumnus reached retirement. D8 shared, “I’m on the downhill side of my career...I think at that time in my career, my life, I will have a little more time than what I have right now.” It also appears that as people get older they, “get a little more sentimental, we’re kind of at a different stage in our lives” (FB1).

Several interview participants and both focus groups described the cycle of life that they believe occurs following graduation. All descriptions were very similar in the stages that they progressed through. D13 stated it this way:

Most people...when you are young...you get out of school and your relationships are still new, so you’re probably going to go to some of the social functions. Once you get a family and you get a career going and it all adds up. It’s a difficult time...you really got a lot on your plate. During that period is when you lose a little anyway. You probably lose sight of the school, probably not one of those things that’s a high priority. And then, that’s what happened to me... once all the kids were grown up...you are kind of out of that mode and you really have a little more time to go back and get reconnected again to the school.

It was clear that in the cycle of life, recent alumni are still thinking about the institution, but do not feel they have the time or resources to contribute or support it; however, when the time comes, they do want to return and reconnect.

### *Transformational Experience*

The last theme was transformational experience. The experience that most participants had as students was transformational. The institution provided the foundation for later success, building confidence and making them more than they thought they

could be. It broadened their perspective and provided opportunities they would not otherwise have had. Many reflected that at the time they did not realize that, but they now attribute much of their success and who they are today to their time on campus.

Nearly all those interviewed indicated their experience at the institution either met or exceeded their expectations. D15 shared, “It was better; it was more than I expected...just had a really amazing time.” Many believed the institution broadened their perspective and provided them opportunities to expand and grow. ND11 shared, “Just broadened my outlook on what was out there, what I could do, what I was capable of.” They were able to try things, make mistakes and learn from their mistakes.

Most think the education they received was outstanding and prepared them to enter their chosen fields. Several shared they were competitive with students from what they considered more prominent institutions. D3 stated, “I feel like I have been able to hold my own...I feel like I had an excellent preparation. I feel like I have been successful in my career because of what I learned.”

Many shared that when they entered college they were underprepared and did not have the skills they needed to be successful, “I was definitely deficient in quite a few areas” (D3). Many others commented they were not as smart as they perceived their peers to be, sharing that they were not smart and had a difficult time. The key to these students continuing was that faculty and other services were available and willing to help them be successful. This built confidence.

Several participants reflected that they did not appreciate the quality of the education they received until later. Once they were working in their chosen field they realized the institution had provided them with a solid foundation and they were

competitive. ND15 commented, “You know, in retrospect I did not appreciate it as much when I was actually involved in it as when I think back on it.”

Overall, participants believed their time on campus was life altering and that it was a culmination of the entire experience, not just one part of the experience. ND6 shared, “I came out of my shell in college...re-invented myself.” D2 reflected, “College made me grow up in ways that I wouldn’t have otherwise...it made me more of what I am.” D3 reflected, “I learned so much about myself as well as about how to be a professional.” D15 summarized, “The university is a part of me, it made me who I am. It’s like part of my soul. It’s who I am. It made me the success that I am.”

#### Discussion of Findings

Alumni are a valuable resource who are currently not being utilized to their fullest potential. Understanding the role the undergraduate experience plays in creating loyalty and attachment to the institution can have an impact on the relationship alumni have with their alma mater. The student experience while on campus has a major impact on feelings and opinions toward the institution as alumni (Sun, 2005; Thomas, 2005).

Studying the undergraduate experience may provide a glimpse into the source of loyalty for individuals who support their alma mater (Meratoris, 2006). As institutional budgets are continuing to shrink it is becoming more important than ever to find new sources of revenue. In the current economy “few new sources of revenue will be available beyond private donations and revenue associated with tuition increases” (Hooker, 2000, p. 13). Alumni who are engaged in the institution can be one of these needed sources. Re-engaging alumni and keeping them connected can be an opportunity for both alumni and the university. The university can utilize the resources of the alumnus’s time, treasure, and talent while the alumnus can benefit from a renewed

relationship with the institution and an opportunity to assist an organization that was important in their development both personally and professionally.

### *Funding Education*

Participants funded their educations in a variety of ways, including loans, scholarships, parental support, and working. Over half of non-donors and three donors utilized loans to pay for school. “I took out tons and tons of student loans” (D1). Monk (2003) found that loans have a negative effect on later support. Parents were cited as the primary source of financial support for seven of the donors, allowing them to not have to take out loans. D9 indicated, “my parents paid, that was one thing that they just sacrificed to do was to pay for education and it was a very important thing to them.” Baade and Sundberg (1996) found that students who went through college without taking out loans were more likely to give.

Having a scholarship as a student did not appear to impact the decision to support the institution, as an equal number of donors and non-donors had received scholarships. This finding contradicts Enyard’s (1993) assertion that scholarship recipients are more likely to give.

Donors who had received scholarships did cite that as a reason for giving back, as both Enyard and Hoyt (2004) had found. For some, receiving a scholarship makes them want to give back as a thank you and to help provide the same opportunity for other students. D3 shared, “When I got that Alumni scholarship, I consciously remember thinking, ‘when I have the money, I need to do the same thing.’ It was just really important to me to make sure they could keep doing that for future students.”

### *Academic Experience*

Nearly all those interviewed thought they had a solid academic experience; in fact, only two donors indicated otherwise. Alumni perceptions of the strength of academic programs influence perception of their experience in and out of the classroom (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003). D10 shared, “I thought the education was outstanding.” Many indicated they did not appreciate how good the education was while they were in school. ND15 commented, “In retrospect, I did not appreciate it as much when I was actually involved in it as when I think back on it.” In some cases they were concerned it was too easy, but realized otherwise once they entered their career. Alumni give because they believe they received a high-quality education and were satisfied with their career preparation (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Boyle, 1992; Heckman & Guskey, 1998; Taylor & Martin, 1995).

Most indicated they were challenged academically. D13 reflected, “I think I really learned; it was not easy, there are some things that you just have to work at.” Students must have a level of challenge at which they are not overwhelmed, and enough support to keep them learning and progressing in their development (Evans, Forney & Guido-Dibrito, 1998).

Several donors shared they were underprepared for college or perceived that they were not as smart as their peers, so they had to work harder. D3 commented, “By the time I got to college I was definitely deficient in quite a few areas.” D2 shared, “There are people who are really smart, but I am not one of them.” Students who experience undergraduate academic success are more likely to support their alma mater (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Conner, 2005; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Miller & Casebeer,

1990; Taylor & Martin, 1995). These same participants expressed the assistance and support they received from faculty helped them in order gain the needed skills to be successful. D8 stated, “Looking back, I think it was all dependent on the professor.” How satisfied students are with their academic experience is directly related to the faculty with whom they interact (Astin, 1984). Alumni who believe they received high-quality instruction and reported a greater level of learning were more likely to have higher overall satisfaction, and more likely to support the institution (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2001; Hoyt; 2004; Utter, Noble & Brady, 1999).

Non-donors were the only ones who had anything negative to say about the education they received. ND 7 commented, “What I learned was that my own education was very far inferior.” Several indicated they thought they were not challenged in their academic experience, and that the instructors were of poor quality. ND5 shared, “To me, a lot of it was nothing more than rote memorization.” Some indicated they thought they were deceived to believe there would be jobs in the field for which they were preparing. ND8 commented, “It was great. The only thing is, you know, I loved what I majored in and I did really good, had a great GPA. Had great teachers and everything. But you know, I just feel like I didn't get told, ‘hey, you’re not gonna make any money in this field, or you’re not gonna find a job in it.’” This supports Heckman and Guskey (1998) finding that “alumni assessed the performance of the university by the placement on a first job and the success of graduates in achieving career goals” (p. 108).

#### *Extracurricular Activities*

Twelve donors and nine non-donors were involved in extracurricular activities, and most of them indicated involvement in multiple activities. The “number of activities

a student engaged in is positively correlated with student satisfaction...[and] the more activities students were involved in, the fewer friendships that were maintained over time” (Ridley & Boone, 2001, p. 11). Types of involvement included intramural and intercollegiate sports, student government, Greek life, academic clubs, and music ensembles. “Odds of alumni giving increases 87 percent in alumni who have participated in extracurricular activities during their undergraduate experience in comparison with those alumni who did not participate....” (Gaier, 2003, p. 54).

Participants indicated that by being involved they gained friendship, opportunities, skills, and experience. Friendship was the number one gain mentioned. D6 commented, “It was a way for me to make and have friends to do things with.” Opportunities included meeting new people, trying new things and attending conferences. D10 reflected:

You meet a lot of people. That social interaction and developing networks with people. Learning how to work with teams and those organizational structures. And you know, most kids who go there are from rural Missouri. Very small towns where they have been around the same people their whole life. Then you come to the university and you meet people and get to know about people you haven't known your whole life. And you get to learn about them and learn valuable skill.

Skills that participants indicated were gained included time management, meeting structure, teamwork, communication skills, and social skills. Several indicated they were able to apply what they learned in the classroom to the activities they were involved in. D3 shared, “Once I started having some positions where I was leading, it really helped me realize that ‘Wow, I really had learned something.’” This supports Kuh’s (1995) findings that specific leadership responsibilities are instrumental in both student learning and personal development. Students benefit in many ways from out-of-class experiences,



ranging from gains in critical thinking to relational and organizational skills, which contribute to satisfaction and success after college.

Many held leadership positions in one or more organizations. These participants indicated similar gains to those just being involved, but in many cases at a higher level. Participants cited that in their leadership roles they had to be more responsible and learn to manage people. ND2 reflected, “Having processes on your shoulders and you having to teach all 50 other members what you are wanting...Everybody is relying on you and trusting in you to make sure that things are getting done right.” Clotfelter (2001) found that alumni who had held a leadership position in an extracurricular activity gave more than those who did not.

Involvement created a connection to the university, allowing students to feel as if they were a part of something bigger. That feeling formed and cemented relationships with peers that would last a lifetime. ND15 stated, “Oh, you know it just ties you more to the university. Anything that you do that involves the social aspect of the university makes you feel more a part of it.” The easier it is to become involved in an institution, the easier it will be for students to feel they belong to the community (Astin, 1984). Those who were involved were more satisfied with their academic experience than those who were not involved (Miller & Casebeer, 1990).

Members of both focus groups believed involvement is important to later connections as an alumnus. FB9 observed, “Active student participation leads to active adult participation, and if a student is active in government or whatever, it is that which leads into those kind of activities.” Findings indicate that students who are involved in extracurricular activities have a higher likelihood of being involved with the university

after graduation and participating in the alumni association (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003; Mulugetta, Nash & Murphy, 1999; Young & Fischer, 1996). Since college friendships with peers appear to have an impact on later involvement with the institution as alumni, student involvement may be key in developing those relationships.

### *Personal Change*

All donors and twelve non-donors believed they changed during college. Those who believed they changed during college asserted that college was life altering in many ways and attributed the change to faculty and involvement in extracurricular activities. Cooper, Healy and Simpson (1994) had similar findings indicating that involvement is related to change in students during college. ND9 commented, “I think I changed and grew and became more professional in my learning style and my work. I think that was because of the teachers and their expectations and their modeling.”

All donors and three non-donors thought that part of the reason for changes they experienced during college were due to the opportunities they had as students. D5 reflected that he was able to try things, “make a mistake, learn from the mistake and then go on without consequences.” Several indicated the institution expanded their world and allowed them to experience new things and make mistakes in a safe environment.

McAlexander and Koenig (2001) summarized the university experience:

While at the university, students often come into contact with people, ideas, and issues that are novel and challenge prior beliefs and values. This time of transition is also a period of experimentation, as students explore alternative self-concepts, behaviors, and lifestyles. In short, the college experience is transformational. (p. 25)

D10 explained how the institution expanded his world. “The different people I ran across from the bigger cities, different countries, different states, made my world a lot bigger

than it had been in the past. And made me realize that, you know, that other people do things differently, see the world differently.”

### *Relationships*

Relationships are very important in both the student and alumni experience, more so than this researcher realized. It is clear from this study that everyone on campus plays a role in the student experience. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a campus to graduate a student. Every part of, and every person at, a university plays a role in the experience a student has while on campus. That experience impacts how students view the campus as a student and later as alumni (Johnson & Eckel, 1998). Relationships with faculty play an important role in student development. Students look up to their faculty and in some ways need their approval and support.

All interview participants talked about having good faculty who cared about them. Many discussed faculty being mentors to them. Faculty teach, mentor and advise students during their time on campus, and these relationships sometimes even continue once the student has graduated (Clotfelter, 2003; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). D3 shared, “I felt like I just had mentors everywhere. All the professors just cared so much.”

Donors could not say enough positive things about the faculty, while some non-donors were more critical. A few non-donors indicated that some of the faculty they had were not there for students and did not believe they were provided a good academic experience in those classes. ND4 commented, “I think of all my professors that I had, and one in particular, I won't say, teaching was, just for like to support another habit.” More donors stayed in touch with faculty than non-donors. Following graduation approximately one-third of alumni maintained contact with university personnel (Hoyt,

2004). These post-graduation interactions further shape alumni attitudes towards the institution (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). Many donors indicated wanting to re-connect with some faculty to tell them thank you. D1 shared, “I’ve e-mailed a number of instructors thanking them for the level of instruction that I got.”

Several from the donor group and the focus groups shared stories about how a faculty member turned their life around. Faculty took them aside and let them know they were making poor choices and warned that if they did not change their ways they would not be successful. AB6 shared, “I remember one that pulled me to the side and ‘said you’re struggling not because of the material, but because you are drinking and chasing too much. I recognize the signs because I did it, too.’ And then he got me on track.” These were pivotal moments for these alumni. Many believed that had that intervention not occurred they may have ended up on a different path. Overall satisfaction with one’s alma mater “most notably was the memory of at least one person associated with the institution who took an interest in [them while they were students]” (Clotfelter, 2003, p. 118) and continued interest in them after they graduated (Boyle, 1992). D3 indicated she has stayed in touch with one of her professors, “We e-mail back and forth regularly and I usually see him every other year or so.”

Friendships with peers also played an important role, but it appears to be more impactful following graduation. Many indicated they met their best friends and spouses while attending college. D12 commented, “I met a lot of good people, some of them are still my best friends.” These friendships keep people connected to the university. That personal connection is what either has kept them engaged or re-engaged them. D13 reflected, “If you didn’t have any relationships that formed while you were in school then

it's going to be really tough to get re-energized back. If I didn't go back with my buddies, I wouldn't go by myself."

Donors seem to have maintained deeper and longer-term relationships with their peers. In reflecting on his friendships, D12 explained, "We get together once every couple of months for breakfast. Strong relationships, tremendous respect for each other. I have a lot of these guys on e-mail and we send e-mails back and forth." Non-donors seem to have maintained more superficial, holiday letter relationships. ND7 shared, "I have lost touch with all except for two and all we do is mail Christmas cards to each other, Christmas letters."

One interesting phenomenon is that alumni are reconnecting with their peers over Facebook. Donors who have re-connected with college friends have made arrangements and coordinated face-to-face reunions. D15 shared that she met a group of college friends in Kansas City recently, "We got each other all on Facebook probably six, eight months ago. We are all catching back up again." Reconnecting this way has actually begun reconnecting them to the university. As they visit, they are reminiscing and becoming nostalgic about their time on campus which is bringing them physically back to campus to visit.

### *Overall Experience*

The total undergraduate experience, both in and out of the classroom, impacts the formation of alumni loyalty and later support to one's alma mater. Satisfaction was greater with the student experience when students believed they had educational gains (Conner, 2005) and that the university contributed to those gains (Sun, 2005). D10 shared, "The education value was outstanding. I thought the quality of professors that I had was really good, and their willingness to work with you as a student."

Donors believed they were part of something bigger while attending the institution, viewed their college experience as positive, and have become more appreciative of it over time. A sense of belonging, or fit, with the institution as a student had a positive impact on future support (Gallo & Hausbchman, 2003; Volkwein & Parmley, 1999). D4 stated, “The nice thing about campus is...it's small enough that you can still do something meaningful there and feel like you are a part of it.” Participants believed that as students their input was important, they were important, and they mattered (Evans, Forney & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). There was nothing the institution could have changed that would have made the experience better for donors.

Most non-donors thought they had a good overall experience, although many mentioned they wished they had been more involved and maintained some of the relationships with their college friends. ND8 commented, “I wish I had more time to go to football and basketball and really get involved.” Several non-donors indicated they were there to get a degree and get out. They treated the experience like a job. ND10 stated, “I knew it was something I had to do so I kind of quickly used it for what I had to do as a tool. I looked at it as a job. So I had to look at it that way so I could get out in three years.” These participants were not involved as students and developed no long-term connections to the institution. Students who had an unsatisfying experience may have negative feelings towards the university and may not assist their institutions when possible (Johnson & Eckel, 1998).

The focus groups believed the undergraduate experience was special; it is different than any other time in an individual’s life, even if they go on to earn additional degrees. FB6 hypothesized, “As you experience something for the first time it has a

greater impact on you than experiencing it for the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> time.” The focus groups also discussed how students who have similar experiences can have different connections to the institution following graduation. AB2 reflected, “I don’t understand the fact that I have relationships with a sorority sister and they have yet to come back to campus. I don’t really know why it is different for me and it’s different for somebody else who probably had very similar experiences here.”

### *Alumni Experience*

While on campus most students did not know about alumni or the alumni association. This was the case for both donors and non-donors. D11 commented, “Well if there was an alumni, I really didn’t, I wasn’t conscious of it, let’s put it that way.” Focus group participants thought that when students are on campus their focus is only on graduation and moving to the next chapter in their lives. FB1 commented, “They haven’t thought that far yet. They’re just worried about getting out of here.” It appears that when students are on campus they are not taught about the alumni relationship and how their relationship with the institution will continue for the rest of their lives. Those few who had an opportunity to interact with alumni while they were students were aware of what alumni did for them as a student and impacted them wanting to do the same thing for future students.

When asked about their alumni experience with the university, participants talked about receiving the alumni magazine and e-newsletter, attending regional events, returning to campus for Homecoming, and being asked for money. Most donors indicated they receive the alumni newsletter and e-newsletter and shared that they liked receiving information about the institution. D15 shared, “I started getting the newsletter. And so

that's when I started reading and checking through it and seeing what else was going on and that's just kind of how it all materialized.” Giving is influenced by reading institutional communications, such as the alumni magazine or newsletters, and is a key way alumni stay connected and understand the needs of the institution (Pearson, 1999; Sun, 2005; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Many non-donors had the perception that they only heard from the institution when being asked for money. When asked if they receive the university magazine, they all indicated they did which illustrated they were hearing from the institution at other times. ND14 commented, “Once in a blue moon I'll hear from somebody either trying to get a donation or something.”

Many donors and a few non-donors indicated attending regional events near where they currently reside and attending reunions and events on campus. ND11 reflected on returning to campus for a reunion, “It was just like old home week, with all the people that were there, even though they looked different. It revived all of us, all the feelings.” Previous research indicates that attendance at events showed a higher chance of alumni giving and involvement (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Collins, Hecht & Strange, 1999; Taylor & Martin, 1995). Heckman and Guskey (1998) found that “both past and future contributors are characterized by higher levels of participation in university sponsored social activities, feeling better informed about the university, and reading university publications more thoroughly” (p. 102).

Many non-donors indicated that since they did not live in the area they were not able to be involved with and support the institution. ND6 commented, “I haven't had too much interaction because it is kind of a regional school and where I went to is pretty far away.” Donors who did not live in the area indicated that if they lived in the area they



hoped there would be additional opportunities to support the institution in addition to giving, and that they took advantage of every opportunity to support the institution. D3 commented, “If I ever live close enough I will volunteer...I would put my time where my mouth is.” Hanson (2000) found that alumni who live out of state are more likely to give, while other research (Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Gaier, 2003; Ridley & Boone, 2001) found that the farther away a graduate lives the lower the ability to predict giving.

Focus group participants and some interview participants who were currently involved with the institution indicated they became involved because someone asked them to, and they wanted the opportunity to give back. AB7 shared that one of the former board presidents contacted her. “He’s a former student of mine and he called and visited with me about it. He made it sound exciting and talked about the changes going on. It was a way to get reconnected.” All of those who indicated being involved as alumni were involved as students. “It is critically important to keep involved students involved as alumni. If not, they are not as likely to be donors” (Minniear, 2006, p. 140). Mulugetta, Nash and Murphy (1999) found several characteristics that increase the odds of becoming involved in the alumni association, which include being involved in student extracurricular groups, and being a member of a sorority or fraternity.

#### *Attachment and Loyalty*

All donors and twelve non-donors indicated having an emotional attachment to their alma mater. Alumni who support their alma mater recognize the emotional attachment they have with the institution and the role it played in their life (Belanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Mosser, 1993; Taylor & Martin, 1995). D3 believed it was “the people, the faculty that I knew so well and that were so caring of me,

and the friends that I made and all the changes that were going on in my life and everything that I was learning at the time.” Those non-donors indicating they did not have an attachment to the institution believed that was due to not being involved in campus life when they attended. ND 15 shared:

I was [not] someone who was an integral part of campus life when they were there and were involved ...you know all the extra clubs and activities. I wasn't that type of student. I think I would have more of an emotional tie to the university had I been that type of student. I regret that I wasn't that kind of student.

Participants indicated that relationships, their overall experience at the institution, and preparation for future success all impacted their attachment. ND2 shared, “I came here to get an education but I came here to also find lifelong friends. I came here to start a career. You know I was looking at it as a different way than just taking classes.”

Attachment appeared to form for most while they were students. Some indicated they were already attached prior to attending as a result of family previously attending. Research suggests that alumni who had other relatives who attended the university are more likely to give (Clotfelter, 2001; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). D11 shared, “In a way I think it may have started, in part, when my brother was working on his degree.” The attachment for most seemed to develop during the first and second year with it solidified by their second or third year. ND1 reflected:

I would imagine it probably started from the first day that I got there, and I would imagine that it really solidified by the second year. You know because in the beginning you are still pretty new and you don't really know, but then the second year you are pretty confident.

Several indicated they did not realize there was an attachment until after they had graduated and later reflected on the experience. ND3 shared, “In the moment I probably wasn't aware, but as I got into my career and began to feel comfortable that I had been

well-prepared for the career I was into. I think in retrospect I was able to see it more clearly.”

Ridley and Boone (2001) defined loyal alumni as “a graduate who readily acknowledges the unique contributions in his/her personal and professional growth and one who has maintained an active interest in the college” (p. 2). All donors and ten non-donors indicated they considered themselves to be loyal alumni. Some of the examples they gave of loyalty included being willing to defend the institution, being satisfied with their education, and being willing to give back to the institution. D1 indicated the reason she was loyal to the institution was due to the, “great satisfaction that I had with my education and the experiences here.” This loyalty is established when alumni are students, forming opinions and impressions while they are on campus which influence support and engagement to their alma mater (Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario, 1996).

Several indicated they were loyal in a non-practicing sort of way. ND3 stated, “I would describe myself as a loyal alumnus. An inactive, loyal alumnus, because I attend Homecoming, but as far as being very active I have not really.” Those who believed they were not loyal indicated they did not think they had a connection to the institution, although several indicated having an emotional attachment. The donors all saw themselves as being actively involved and engaged with the university. Donors also indicated more of a connection to a particular part of the institution, but caring about the entire university. It could be that donors having a connection to a particular area makes them more motivated to support the institution.

### *Support*

All donors and three non-donors indicated they support the institution. When alumni make the decision to support their alma mater it exhibits the high affinity they

have for the institution (Stutler & Calvario, 1996). Participants were asked in what ways alumni can support the institution, and the first reaction for most was financially. When asked about other types of support alumni could provide, many had to be prompted to think of other ways that alumni can support their alma mater. D5 commented, “I think that there are a lot of things an alumnus can do in a non-economic way. Economics are obvious. You can do what you do.”

Other forms of support participants thought alumni could provide the institution included promoting the institution, hiring graduates, attending events, and volunteering time. D8 had similar thoughts:

Speaking both in an encouraging and positive manner about the institution, university. The willingness to give time and resources. Whether that be money, time, expertise, all of those things. The willingness to participate and be active in events and activities whenever possible.

Volunteering time included speaking in classes, serving on committees or advisory boards, working with student groups and assisting with planning alumni events. Johnson and Eckel (1998) noted that:

In addition to financial gifts, alumni assist...notably through their time, energy and effort. Many alumni are active ambassadors for their institutions, serving as alumni volunteers and lobbyists, acting as mentors to undergraduates, cheering on athletic teams, attending events and sitting on institutional boards. (p. 228)

Participants talked about promoting the institution, but did not mention wearing university logoed clothing until asked if they did. When promoted, all affirmed that yes, they did wear university logoed items.

When donors were asked why they support the institution, several indicated they wanted to give back to the institution that had given them so much in order for future

students to have the same experience. D5 shared, “The most predominant way I support the institution is my wife and I endowed a scholarship... a scholarship that allows a student to have a modest stipend and also arranges for that student to work in the Athletic Department, much as I did when I was there.” This supports Hoyt’s (2004) finding that the primary reasons that alumni provided for making financial contributions is “a sense of obligation or desire to give back to the college” (p. 15). It also is an example of “gift exchange theory” which suggests that institutions provided alumni with several advantages in life including their education and the start to their career. Grateful alumni then give the institution time, energy, leadership, and emotional support (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990).

Focus group participants believed the primary reason that alumni gave back to the university is that they were asked. FB1 shared, “I didn’t give, didn’t think of giving for several years after I graduated, but it was the persistency of getting tapped on the shoulder getting a phone call, hi I’m with ... so I eventually started giving.” McNally (1985) questioned if the reason that fewer alumni are giving each year was a result of not being asked, or not having been asked in a convincing manner. Minniear (2006) stated, “Being asked was the strongest predictor of whether or not an individual donated to their alma mater” (p. 133). One of the primary reasons alumni indicated for not giving is that they have never been asked (Hoyt, 2004).

Non-donors had many reasons for not supporting the institution, including not living nearby and having children still living at home. Some troubling research by Belfield and Beney (2000) indicated that “around one-third of all graduates seem set

against giving, and around two-thirds are, or at least appear to be, sympathetic but unwilling to donate” (p. 69).

All interview participants and both focus groups do not believe that alumni understand why support of their alma mater is important. AB3 stated, “Overall I don’t think that the average alumnus realizes what their participation back with the university would mean.” It appears many view the institution as a “state” school and believe that the state is providing for what tuition does not. ND7 illustrated that she did not understand why it is important by stating, “I’m surprised to get phone calls from people asking for support because I think it is public education and it is being supported.” It was clear alumni do not realize that the trend in higher education has long been on a decline in federal, state, and local government appropriations (Terry & Macy, 2007).

Focus group participants believed that philanthropic tendencies began at home, but that the institution can impact philanthropic tendencies. FB3 commented, “One would be what we see from our parents. What’s modeled at home.” They indicated this could be taught while students were on campus. They also thought giving is a personal decision and it has to do with the individual person and their values. FB2 commented further, “I think it’s something inside of you, too. It’s self-fulfilling when it’s a need of your own, too. It’s like you feel you need to be helping other people.” This supports Leslie, Drachman, Conrad, and Ramey’s (1983) view that giving was generally for personal, rather than financial, reasons.

### *Stage in Life*

What stage alumni are in their life appears to have an impact on their level of involvement and support with the institution. Many interview participants and both focus groups discussed how life stages have an impact on their relationship with the university.

Some younger non-donors used current family obligations as the reason they were not more involved with their alma mater. ND8 reflected, “You know, family life has kept me busy with three children.” Some previous studies indicated that young alumni are giving less, or not at all (Monks, 2003; Willemain, Goal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994). Several studies indicated alumni with children gave more than alumni without children (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Dugan, Mullin & Siegfried, 2000; Hanson, 2000; Mosser, 1993;). Belanger (1999), however, found that having children is a poor predictor of alumni giving.

Findings indicated alumni who have been out of school for at least 25 years are more likely to give (Bristol, 1991). Older donors were the most reflective of the stages of life, talking about raising a family and not having time, but once the kids were gone they were able to come back to the university. D13 shared:

When you are young, you get out of school...Once you get a family and you get a career going and it all adds up. It's a difficult time... but you really got a lot on your plate. During that period is when... you probably lose sight of the school, probably not one of those things that high priorities. And then... once all the kids were grown up you are kind of out of that mode and you really have a little more time to go back and get reconnected.

Those who received additional degrees were more likely to support the institution. Two-thirds of the donors indicated they had received additional degrees. Almost half of the donors indicated they had received at least one additional degree from the same institution. Only four non-donors had received advanced degrees, with two of them receiving advanced degrees from the same institution. These findings supported that some research indicates individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to give (Belanger, 1999; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1989; Taylor & Martin, 1995), and that a

strong predictor of alumni giving is receiving more than one degree from the same institution (Brittingham & Pezzullo; Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994).

Focus group participants shared similar perspectives on the stages of life impacting involvement. They believed alumni would come back and re-engage with the university when they had the opportunity, and the university needed to make sure there were easy opportunities for alumni to do that. FB7 emphasized, “That’s why it’s important to just keep the door open to all alumni as much as possible because you never know when that day is going to hit. We all hit it at different points in our lives, where we want to start giving back, hitting it for the first time or in a bigger way.”

### Conclusions

This study explored how the undergraduate student experience impacts the formation of alumni loyalty. In interview and focus groups both the student and alumni experience were explored through interviews and focus groups in an effort to understand how those experiences impacted the formation of loyalty and when that loyalty is formed. Seven research questions were used to guide this study and lend insight into what contributes to alumni loyalty and support to their alma mater.

#### *Question One: How do alumni define loyalty?*

Participants provided a variety of definitions when asked to define loyalty. The common ideas that were expressed are that loyalty is based on mutual respect; there is an emotional attachment, caring, and understanding. D1 stated, “Loyalty is having allegiance to a person place or thing, having an emotional allegiance or attachment.” People are proud and protective of what they are loyal to, giving unconditional support, ultimately staying true even in the face of adversity. D3 reflected, “It is wanting to help,



wanting to give back to whatever, wanting to make that sacrifice to help. Not just doing it, but actually being happy to do it.”

Focus group participants reflected in the same way as the interview participants, providing similar ideas for a definition. FB4 summed it up by stating, “I guess loyalty is that you’re not only participating and engaged but you’re also recruiting others to be engaged, you’re an apostle, you’re out there selling others on why it’s such a great place.”

For their research Ridley and Boone (2001) defined loyal alumni as “a graduate who readily acknowledges the unique contributions in his/her personal and professional growth and one who has maintained an active interest in the college” (p. 2). Their definition has similar characteristics to how participants in this study defined loyalty.

*Question Two: How do alumni exhibit loyalty to their alma mater?*

Participants believed that alumni can exhibit loyalty to their alma mater in a variety of ways. Many thought loyal alumni should be willing to give back or repay the institution, offer support by giving of their time, treasure or talent. This could be through financial gifts, hiring graduates, offering internships to current students, speaking in classes, or serving on committees or advisory boards. D10 commented, “I am willing to give of my time and treasures to the university if called upon.” Johnson and Eckel (1998) noted:

In addition to financial gifts, alumni assist...notably through their time, energy and effort. Many alumni are active ambassadors for their institutions, serving as alumni volunteers and lobbyists, acting as mentors to undergraduates, cheering on athletic teams, attending events and sitting on institutional boards. (p. 228)

Several indicated loyal alumni would recommend and promote the institution to others. ND9 commented, “I think always being positive about your experiences there and

wanting to make sure that people know about that school and what a great university it is.” Part of promoting included wearing university logoed items and being ready to defend the institution if needed. D9 shared, “If someone were to say, in their opinion the university was an inferior institution, I would defend that vehemently.”

Participants indicated loyal alumni also stay informed about the institution and participate in university activities and events. D12 commented, “Participation of activities, staying informed about university events, staying connected, becoming an active donor, either in time or resources.” Heckman and Guskey (1998) found that “both past and future contributors are characterized by higher levels of participation in university sponsored social activities, feeling better informed about the university, and reading university publications more thoroughly” (p. 102).

Ultimately, a loyal alumnus is engaged with the institution in some way in order to understand why the institution needs support and in what ways the alumnus can personally assist the university. ND12 summarized, “I guess most of all it's being interested and knowing and understanding enough about what is going on in order to do things to help.” Alumni loyalty is the most significant factor in determining alumni support (Conner, 2005). When alumni make the decision to support their alma mater it exhibits the high affinity they have for the institution (Stutler & Calvario, 1996).

*Question Three: What undergraduate experiences impact long-term affiliation or disaffiliation with one's alma mater?*

Experiences that students have while they are on campus are correlated with their feelings toward the institution after graduation. Alumni who have positive feelings toward the institution may feel more connected, become involved, and provide support to

their alma mater (Johnson & Eckel, 1998). Students who had an unsatisfying experience may have negative feelings towards the university, and may not assist their institutions when possible (Johnson & Eckel). Long-term affiliation with one's alma mater appears to be impacted by: relationships formed as an undergraduate and carried into the rest of their lives, academic experiences, and extracurricular experiences.

Relationships appear to have the strongest impact on long-term affiliation. These can be with either peers or faculty. Faculty served as teachers, mentors, role models and friends. ND9 reflected, "I think the teachers and their expectations and their modeling of how a professional acts and their caring attitude." Faculty teach, mentor and advise students during their time on campus, and these relationships may even continue once the student has graduated (Clotfelter, 2003; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). Meaningful relationships with peers that begin while a student is on campus and carry on past graduation enable alumni to maintain a connection to the institution. These friends have regular contact and communication. D12 shared, "I met a lot of good people, some of them still my best friends. We get together once every couple of months." These groups of friends will attend campus activities, reunions, gatherings, and sporting events together. They keep each other connected.

Experiences in and out of the classroom provided students with the opportunity to try new things, broaden their perspective, and form relationships. D5 share, "I found that my experiences on campus...were absolutely invaluable, allowing me to make mistakes, screw up, not be slapped, and just continue to learn by doing." These all contribute to satisfaction with the education they received, and overall satisfaction with their undergraduate experience. D3 shared, "I really enjoyed everything that I did and really

threw myself in it. It was a lifestyle, not just an education.” Students who were satisfied and were invested in the institution are more likely to give back to their alma mater (Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario, 1996; Utter, Noble & Brady, 1999).

Disaffiliation with one’s alma mater appears to be impacted by not forming long-term relationships as a student, not being involved or connected to the institution as a student, utilizing loans to pay for their education, and perceiving that they received a poor education. Relationships with college friends were maintained on a superficial level such as only exchanging holiday letters. Disaffiliated alumni indicated they were not involved with the institution as students. ND 15 shared, “I was [not] someone who was an integral part of campus life when they were there... I wasn't that type of student. I think I would have more of an emotional tie to the university had I been that type of student.” Non-donors had to utilize more loans to pay for their education than donors. Several disaffiliated alumni perceived they did not receive a quality education. ND7 stated, “My own education was very far inferior.” “Dissatisfied alumni are lost opportunities for institutional gain, similar to the dissatisfied customers who no longer patronize a store” (Johnson & Eckel, p. 229).

*Question Four: At what point does loyalty to one’s alma mater form?*

The potential for loyalty forming to one’s alma mater can occur at three different points: prior to attending, during the first several years of their student experience, or following graduation. Ridley and Boone (2001) found that factors that occurred while an alumnus was a student and factors following graduation had an impact on loyalty.

The first point that loyalty may begin to form is prior to even enrolling. This could be a result of having a family member who had previously attended or grew up in

the community the university is located in. D11 shared, “In a way I think it may have started, in part, when my brother was working on his degree.” Some believe that it begins to form during the admissions process.

Loyalty is established when alumni are students, forming opinions and impressions while they are on campus, which influences support and engagement to their alma mater (Pearson, 1999; Stutler & Calvario, 1996). Loyalty begins when the student first arrives on campus and is solidified by the second or third year when one has found his or her niche at the institution. ND1 stated, “I would imagine it probably started from the first day that I got there, and I would imagine that it really solidified by the second year.”

The final point at which loyalty formed or solidified is following graduation when alumni reflect on their experience at the institution and realize the foundation the university provided in order for them to be successful. ND3 shared, “In the moment I probably wasn't aware, but as I got into my career and began to feel comfortable that I had been well-prepared for the career.”

*Question Five: What impacts the formation of loyalty?*

The factors that impact the formation of loyalty also impact alumni affiliation with the institution. Relationships have the most impact on the formation of loyalty. “Research reveals the powerful influence of relationships on every facet of loyalty” (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001, p. 37). The second biggest impact appears to be satisfaction with the overall undergraduate experience. Alumni who support their alma mater recognize the emotional attachment they have with the institution and the role it played in their life (Belanger, 1999; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Brittingham & Pezzullo,

1989; Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Mosser, 1993; Taylor & Martin, 1995).

Relationships are important to the student experience, overall satisfaction with the undergraduate experience, and, ultimately, the formation of alumni loyalty. D3 believed it was “the people, the faculty that I knew so well and that were so caring of me, and the friends that I made and all the changes that were going on in my life and everything that I was learning at the time.” D1 shared, “considering the great satisfaction that I had with my education and the experiences here.” Those who did not have positive interactions with faculty and did not form long-term meaningful relationships with faculty or peers did not seem to have an attachment to the institution and did not view themselves as loyal.

*Question Six: What can be done to improve the student experience to increase the chances of loyalty formation?*

Overall, the participants’ perception of their total student experience was very positive. Most participants indicated they enjoyed their time on campus and were satisfied with their academic and overall experience. When asked, there were few suggestions about what could be done to improve the experience.

Since it has become evident that relationships are so crucial to both the formation of loyalty and long-term affiliation with the institution, it would be important to ensure the campus remains small with the same friendly atmosphere that many participants cited. ND12 shared, “It is a small, friendly, campus. It has good location, good logistics. The people there are bright, intelligent.” Faculty need to make a point of forming relationships with students and taking a genuine interest in them. ND7 commented, “I

remember being able to talk to faculty. It wasn't such a big school that they were impersonal. I felt like I got to know professors, I always felt they were good professors.”

The quality of the education is high and most students are satisfied with their overall experience on campus. Friendship was cited as the number one gain associated with involvement in extracurricular activities. Many non-donors reported not being involved in extra-curricular activities. Since this is important to the formation of relationships, an effort needs to be made to get all students involved in something. This may mean that involvement needs to be looked at creatively, and with new ideas tried, in order to attract the current non-joiners.

Most did not know about alumni or the alumni association when they were students. An effort should be made to educate students about what it means to be an alumnus of the institution, share what the expectations are of that relationship, and to instill or nurture philanthropic tendencies while they are on campus. FB4 shared, “I think we play a big role, I think it starts at home, but just like anything with your initial experience, if it’s not nurtured and raised and given chances.” Increasing student opportunities to interact and network with alumni would allow students to understand the long-term relationship and how they can support the institution in the future. D3 shared this experience:

Well, the Band Alumni Association is very active and I got their scholarship...It was all about them and them being at Homecoming every year, they made a big deal...So I think as an undergrad...I knew this was something that we need to do. We need to have alums be connected...they are a big part of the greater campus community. I think I left with the concept that it was important to give back.

*Question Seven: What motivates alumni to support, or inhibits them from supporting, their alma mater?*

Satisfaction with their undergraduate experience clearly plays a role in what motivates alumni to support their alma mater. More accurately, alumni feel a need to repay the institution for what it has provided them and ensure that current students have the same experience they did. ND12 commented, “I appreciate the university. It changed my life. If I hadn't went to the university then I would not have had the wonderful career I had.” Several previous studies also revealed that a motivation for alumni to give is to repay the institution (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990; Elliott, 2006; O’Conner, 1961).

Many alumni indicated they want to see the institution continue to provide a high level of education, with several donors indicating they currently see the institution moving in a positive direction and staying current with the changing world. ND3 discussed the role the institution is playing to meet the changing societal demands:

It is always growing and it is in a state of expansion and I don't mean population wise. I mean as far as the changes happening in society is shifting to meet the challenges of those changes...with its academic focus...also has expanded programs and opportunities...relative to the structural shifts occurring in our society.

A final simple reason that alumni support their institution is they were asked to do so. Being asked is an important predictor in alumni being motivated to give (Hoyt, 2004; McNally, 1985; Minniear, 2006). Whether it is being asked to make a financial contribution or to serve on a committee or advisory board, in the end it is that they were asked to help. D15 shared, “I give, every time they send me something I usually try to give them twenty-five bucks or fifty bucks or something like that.” FB7 stated, “I was



approached and I think that is probably what we all have in common is being approached to serve. This is home and I want to give back.”

A few things that inhibit alumni from supporting their alma mater were not being satisfied with their undergraduate experience and the university receiving bad press. D13 also shared his disappointment, “I think there was some negative politics, which is as it is in life... There were things going on, but it seemed like some of it got run through the papers more than it needed to...”

#### Implications for Practice

This research has many implications for future practice in the alumni relations field as well as in student and academic affairs. Understanding the impact the undergraduate experience has on alumni loyalty can assist institutions as they look at ways to engage alumni and increase alumni support for their alma mater. Personal connections need to be utilized and connections that already exist capitalized upon. Alumni should have a variety of options for involvement in the institution.

Personal connections with alumni are important. These connections are what keep them involved in the life of the institution so they are giving of their time, treasure and talent. Personal connections can be maintained through faculty that instructed the student, but also through current faculty and staff as well as former students and peers. Every member of the campus community needs to work to make personal connections with alumni to bring them back and get them connected. It is important for institutions to utilize their current volunteers to tap into potential new volunteers. Faculty and staff need to be willing to reach out to alumni and ask them to be involved. Emeriti and former faculty should also be utilized to assist in forming and maintaining connections.

The time faculty spent with students matters. The interest faculty take in students and the care they put into the relationship has an impact on student lives, long-term success, and later involvement with the institution. It is important that faculty continue to invest time in relationships with students. This goes beyond teaching classes; it involves knowing their students and playing a role in their lives. Faculty are much of the reason students stick it out to graduate and remain connected to the institution following graduation. Many donors support their alma mater because someone cared about them while they were a student, and they want that same experience for future students.

Facebook and other social networking sights are re-connecting alumni in a variety of ways. As alumni reconnect they are reminiscing about their time on campus and this is inadvertently reconnecting them back to the institution. Some alumni offices have social networking sites. Although some alumni appear to be connecting without the influence of the institution, institutions should ensure they have a presence on the social networking sights alumni are using and that they stay up to date on upcoming technology. If students are using technology then the alumni office needs to be aware of it and determine how they can utilize it to communicate with alumni.

Institutions might consider educating alumni on what it means to support their alma mater and why their support is so important. Alumni need to understand that support is more than financial contributions. This education begins when alumni are students. Institutions should educate students about what it means to be an alumnus, and why that is a special and important relationship. Education should begin when students arrive on campus and should occur in a variety of ways throughout their time as students. Students should know what alumni do for the institution and them as students. Students

should have an opportunity to interact with alumni in a variety of ways throughout their time on campus. This can be done by getting alumni involved in extracurricular activities as well as academic areas. Alumni can be speakers, mentors, and guests. Alumni have much to offer their alma mater and current students, and their alma mater and current students have a lot to gain from them.

Institutions should provide a variety of ways alumni can become engaged and give back to the institution. There needs to be different levels and types of involvement opportunities so that alumni can find a way to connect that they do not find intimidating. These opportunities should be easy for alumni to find and participate in. It is important that alumni know that their support to the institution is important, and ways that they can easily provide support depending on what life stage they are in. Alumni should know the door is always open for when they decide they are ready to become involved.

Opportunities that institutions should have for alumni to become involved should be varied and distinct to allow for different levels of involvement. A campus speakers bureau could be created in which alumni who are willing to speak in classes or with students would submit information about themselves and the topics they would like to speak on. This would then be promoted to faculty and staff as a resource. There should be regional volunteers who are willing to visit with other alumni who may be moving to the area they currently live in order to and assist with adjusting to the area. There should be coordination with the admissions process so alumni can assist with promoting new students and coordination with career services so alumni can mentor current students, offer internships and hire graduates.

Alumni should be recognized for giving of their time, treasure and talents. There should be processes put in place that alert the alumni office when alumni are assisting the institution. This could trigger a thank you from the alumni office. The alumni office should also be tracking all of the ways in which alumni are supporting the institution, and that should be shared with the campus community as well as other alumni.

Overall, all parts of an institution need to focus on the connections and relationships with current students and alumni. Everyone needs to be constantly thinking about those connections and ways they can invite alumni to be a part of the life of the institution, how they can help the institution, and how they can continue to support their alma mater.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research should be conducted on alumni loyalty, how that loyalty forms, what impacts that formation, and what role loyalty plays in alumni support. In addition, research should continue in an effort to address how alumni support their alma maters and what motivates them to do so. Quantitative research should continue. More qualitative studies should be explored to provide some insight into the findings. To fully explore these issues, more mixed methods research should be employed, fully utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Specific studies that should be considered for future research include:

1. Conducting a longitudinal study from the time students are admitted to campus, throughout their time on campus, and into their alumni experience
2. Studies should be conducted of current student views on alumni, loyalty and future support to their alma mater.

3. Research should be done with specific groups to look at how similar experiences shape people differently. An example would be to look at a Greek group; exploring fellow Greek alumni who were on campus during the same period of time and their experiences.
4. Studies should be focused on just one decade of graduates at a time to gain a better understanding of their student experience, and later alumni experience.
5. While this study was looking at the undergraduate experience, studies should be conducted to look at alumni who receive only their master's degree or terminal degree from an institution to determine if they feel an attachment or loyalty to the institution.
6. Research should be conducted to look at differences in the process of loyalty development and views on support between students that start and finish at the same institution and students that transfer in and complete their degree.
7. A study should be conducted to see how a long-term relationship is created and maintained with students that attended as older students or with families.
8. Many schools have developed satellite campuses. Do these students feel the same connection to the institution as students that attend on the main campus? Data should be collected to determine this.
9. An increasing number of schools are offering on-line degrees. Research should be conducted to determine the type of relationship those students have with their institution and if there is, or is not, a long-term attachment and relationship.

10. Studies should be conducted on how key relationships form in college and what can be done to ensure those relationships form and nurture them into relationships alumni maintain following graduation.
11. Research should be conducted to see what current students know about the alumni relationship to determine how programs could educate students on the continued relationship the institution would like them to maintain as alumni.

### Summary

Alumni are a significant part of any university community. Loyal alumni play an important role in the life of the institution. Understanding how loyalty is formed is key to shaping loyalty while alumni are students. The benefit of alumni loyalty to institutions is immeasurable. Loyal alumni volunteer, mentor students, hire graduates, recruit students, and make financial contributions. In these current economic times, this support is something institutions cannot ignore.

There has been extensive research conducted on trying to predict alumni giving and determine if alumni will give based on a wide range of variables relating to demographic information, their student experience, and involvement as alumni. It is clear that alumni give for a variety of reasons, but the common theme is that they care about their alma mater for some reason.

This qualitative study, conducted at a Midwestern public institution, looked at the impact the undergraduate experience has on the formation of alumni loyalty. Data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups and analyzed using open and axial coding.

Findings indicate the relationships formed while still a student play an important role in the formation of loyalty and long-term affiliation with the institution. In addition, the alumni's satisfaction with overall student experience impacts both relationships and loyalty.

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Appendix A  
Research Materials  
For Interviews

E-MAIL FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FOUNDATION ALERTING  
ALUMNI ABOUT THE UPCOMING RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW INVITATION

Subject: Upcoming Alumni Research

Text:

UCM Alumni:

Jenne Vanderbout, UCM's Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving, is currently working on her dissertation for her doctoral degree. She is conducting qualitative research on alumni loyalty and would like to interview alumni to assist in her work. I would respectfully ask that you consider being a part of this study when you receive an invitation e-mail from Jenne. I think the research, when completed, will also assist UCM in better serving our great alumni.

My thanks in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Dale Carder  
Interim Chief Development Officer  
Interim Executive Director of UCM Foundation  
Smiser Alumni Center  
6605438000  
University of Central Missouri  
Warrensburg Mo. 64093

## INVITATION E-MAIL TO ALUMNI TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS

Subject: Assistance needed with UCM Alumni Study

Text:

UCM Alumni!

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri - I am currently conducting a qualitative research study on the formation of alumni loyalty. I would like to interview approximately thirty alumni in an effort to better understand how and when alumni loyalty towards one's alma mater is formed, and how alumni define being loyal to their alma mater. I am hoping you will be willing to assist me.

I would like to set up an interview with you at your convenience within the next month. The interview will last thirty minutes to one hour. The interview will be conducted at your convenience. Your participation will be confidential and your input will be used in a way that does not reveal your identity.

This study is designed to have an impact on future practice. The University of Central Missouri's office of Alumni Relations is aware of this study and looks forward to considering its results as it plans its future activities in supporting alumni. Your participation may help.

As a doctoral student I greatly appreciate your consideration for involvement in this project. I will be happy to send you the results of the study if you would like a copy.

If you have any questions or need additional information please reply to this e-mail. If you would be willing to participate in this study please [click here](#) to respond.

Sincerely,

Jenne L. Vanderbout  
Candidate for an Ed.D.

LINK TO SIGN UP TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Thank you for signing up to participate in this study. You will be contacted within the next two weeks to arrange an interview time. Please provide the following information so that I can contact you.

First Name

Last Name

Maiden Name

Class Year

Degree

City

State

Day time Phone

Evening Phone

Best time to be reached



## FOLLOW UP E-MAIL TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Interview Confirmation

Text:

Hello <<Name>>!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study “Impact the Undergraduate Student Experience has on the Development of Alumni Loyalty.” Per our conversation, I have confirmed an interview appointment with you for <<<DAY, MONTH DATE, 2010>>> at <<<time>>>. We will be meeting at <<<Location agreed to meet>>>. The interview will last a minimum of thirty minutes and a maximum of one hour.

Enclosed is an informed consent form that can be returned to me on the day of our interview. If you have any questions regarding the informed consent or any aspect of this study, please contact me at 660-441-7897.

As a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis I greatly appreciate your participation in this study. I will be happy to send you the results of the study if you would like a copy. Again, thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely,

Jenne L. Vanderbout  
Candidate for an Ed.D.

NOT NEEDED AS AN INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT E-MAIL

Subject: Thank You for Your Interest

Text:

Dear <<<NAME>>>,</p></div>
<div data-bbox="171 254 846 352" data-label="Text">
<p>Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study, "Impact the Undergraduate Student Experience has on the Development of Alumni Loyalty." I appreciate your willingness to assist, however, we have exceeded the number of interview participants needed for this study. I hope you will consider participating in future study that the University may conduct.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="171 366 269 385" data-label="Text">
<p>Thank you!</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="171 399 359 433" data-label="Text">
<p>Jenne L. Vanderbout  
<Candidate for an Ed.D.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="509 918 545 935" data-label="Page-Footer">
<p>196</p>
</div>

Appendix B  
Interview Protocol

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study entitled “Impact the Undergraduate Student Experience has on the Development of Alumni Loyalty.” As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri – Columbia. I will be interviewing approximately 30 alumni for this study in an effort to understand how alumni loyalty is defined, when it is formed, what undergraduate experiences impact its formation, and how alumni exhibit loyalty. Results of this study will remain confidential. You will not be identified in any way.

The confirmation e-mail I sent you contained an “Informed Consent Form.” Have you had an opportunity to look that over?

- If Yes
  - Do you have any questions for me about the form?
  - Could I get you to sign it? We will not be able to proceed with the interview until I have a signed copy.
- If No
  - Could you please take a moment to look this over?
  - Once they have read it over
    - Do you have any questions for me about the form?
    - Could I get you to sign it? We will not be able to proceed with the interview until I have a signed copy.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin our discussion? (I will answer any questions that they have).

I will be recording our interview today. This will be only used for research purposes to ensure I capture your thoughts accurately. Are you OK with this?

I have approximately 24 questions that I would like to discuss with you today. If any question is asked that you do not want to answer just let me know that and we will move to the next question. Are you ready to begin? (We will begin when they are ready)

(Start the recorder)

## Interview Questions

### Warm-Up

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Why did you choose to attend the University, and was it what you expected?
3. Tell me about your time on campus.
4. How many years were you on campus?

### Academic Experience

5. What was your academic experience like?
  - Were you challenged?
    - No
      - Why not?
      - What would have made the experience more challenging?
    - Yes
      - In what ways?
6. How would you rate the value and quality of the education you received?

### Student Involvement

7. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?
  - Yes
    - What did you participate in?
    - What did you get out of those experiences?
    - Did you hold any leadership positions?

- Yes
  - ✓ What did you get out of your leadership experience?
- No
  - Why did you choose not to participate in extracurricular activities?

### Relationships

8. What were your interactions with faculty and staff like?

- Do you still keep in touch with any faculty or staff?
  - Yes
    - Tell me about that relationship

9. Do you have any faculty who stand out in your mind?

- Yes
  - Who?
  - Why do they stand out?

10. What were your interactions with other students like?

- Do you still keep in touch with fellow classmates?
  - Yes
    - Tell me about those relationships

11. Do you think your peers had a similar or different experience than you did?

## Overall Experience

12. How did you pay for college?

- Did you have financial Aide?
- Did you receive any scholarships?
- Did you work?
  - On or off campus?

13. Do you think you changed while attending the University?

- Yes
  - In what ways?
  - To what do you attribute these changes?

14. What three things were you most satisfied with from the University?

15. What three suggestions, if any, would you give that would have made your University experience better?

## Alumni Experience

16. When you were a student what did you know about alumni and the alumni association?

17. As a student did you ever consider giving back to the institution?

18. Tell me about your experiences as an alumnus of the University?

19. Do you support the University?

- Use as a prompt for different types of support
  - Spoken in a class?
  - Referred a student?
  - Attended an event?
  - Volunteered in any way?

- Made a monetary gift?
- Offered an internship? / Hired a graduate?
- Yes
  - In what ways do you support the University?
  - Why have you decided to support the University?
  - When did you first commit to give back to the University?
  - What motivated you to give back?
  - Do think alumni understand why support of their alma mater is important?
- No
  - Why not?

20. What about your undergraduate experience impacted this decision to support or not support the University?

- What about your undergraduate experience shaped your view on supporting the University?

21. Do you feel connected to the University as a whole, to a particular part or not at all?

- Why do you feel that way?
- Please explain.

22. What do you currently like most about the University?

23. What do you currently like least about the University?



### View of Loyalty

24. Do you feel you have an emotional attachment to the University?

- Please explain
- What do you think impacted that?
- When do you think that formed?

25. How would you define loyalty?

26. Would you describe yourself as a loyal alumnus?

- Yes
  - Why?
  - How do you exhibit loyalty to the University?
- No
  - Why not?

27. What do you think are traits that are exhibited by a loyal alumnus?

28. How do you feel that your relationship with the University will change over time?

OR

How has your relationship with the University changed over time?

### Wrap up

29. Is there anything else I should know about your views regarding this topic?

## Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to visit with me on this topic. I will be sending a copy of the transcript for your review. When you receive it please review it and let me know if you feel it is an accurate representation of our discussion here today.

I will be providing a copy of this study to anyone that is interested. Since you were involved in this study would you like to receive a copy of the research?

- If yes
  - Let them know that it will be sent to them before the end of the year
  
- If no
  - If you change your mind just let me know

If at any point you have additional questions about this study please let me know. Here is a card with my contact information in case you need to reach me.

Again, thank you for taking part in this study

Appendix C  
Research Material for  
Focus Groups

E-MAIL FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FOUNDATION BOARD AND  
ALUMNI BOARD ALERTING ABOUT THE UPCOMING RESEARCH  
AND FOCUS GROUP INVITATION

Subject: Dissertation Research

Text:

Jenne Vanderbout, UCM's Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving, is currently working on her dissertation for her doctoral degree. She is conducting qualitative research on alumni loyalty. In that regard, I would like to ask for volunteers from the Foundation Board and the Alumni Board to be involved in one of two focus groups lasting approximately one hour. This would be done following each boards August Board meeting. She needs 8-10 participants from each board. I think this research, when completed, could assist us in better serving the great alumni of the University of Central Missouri. Please respond to this e-mail if you would like to assist Jenne and UCM. My thanks for your consideration.

Dale Carder  
Interim Executive Director of UCM Foundation



## FOLLOW UP E-MAIL TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Thank You for Agreeing to Participate

Text:

Hello <<Name>>!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study “Impact the Undergraduate Student Experience has on the Development of Alumni Loyalty.” Per our correspondence, I have confirmed your participation in a focus group on <<<DAY, MONTH DATE, 2010>>> at <<<time>>>. The focus group will be meeting at the Smiser Alumni Center which is located in the Elliot Union on the University of Central Missouri Campus. Directions are attached. The focus group will last about an hour.

Enclosed is an informed consent form that can be returned to me on the day of the focus group. If you have any questions regarding the informed consent or any aspect of this study, please contact me at 660-441-7897.

As a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis I greatly appreciate your participation in this study. I will be happy to send you the results of the study if you would like a copy. Again, thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely,

Jenne L. Vanderbout  
Candidate for an Ed.D.

Appendix D  
Focus Group Protocol

## FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study entitled “Impact the Undergraduate Student Experience has on the Development of Alumni Loyalty.” As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri – Columbia. I am conducting two focus groups one with members of the Alumni Association Board of Directors and one with the Foundation Board of Directors. This study is being conducted in an effort to understand how alumni loyalty is defined, when it is formed, what undergraduate experiences impact its formation, and how alumni exhibit loyalty. Results of this study will remain confidential. You will not be identified in any way.

The confirmation e-mail I sent each of you contained an “Informed Consent Form”. Have you had an opportunity to look that over?

- If Yes
  - Do you have any questions for me about the form?
  - Could I get you to sign it? We will not be able to proceed with the interview until I have a signed copy.
- If No
  - Could you please take a moment to look this over?
  - Once they have read it over
    - Do you have any questions for me about the form?
    - Could I get you to sign it? We will not be able to proceed with the interview until I have a signed copy.

I want to remind everyone that we will be video recording this focus group today. The video will only be used for research purposes to ensure I capture your thoughts accurately.

I have approximately 16 questions that I would like to discuss with you today. If any question is asked that you do not want to answer just let me know that and we will move to the next question. Are you ready to begin? (We will begin when they are ready)



## Questions

### Warm-Up

1. Tell us your name, the year you graduated, and how long you have served on the board.
2. What motivated you to serve on the board?

### Academic Experience

3. How would you rate the value and quality of the education the institution provides?

### Student Involvement

4. What role do you believe student involvement plays in the development of alumni loyalty?

### Relationships

5. What role do you think the relationships alumni form while on campus plays in the development of Loyalty?
  - Prompts
    - Faculty
    - Staff
    - Other students

### Alumni Experience/Support

6. When you were students did you know about alumni and the alumni association?
7. As a student did you ever consider giving back to the institution?
8. How do you believe philanthropic tendencies are instilled?
  - Can the University have an impact on this?

9. In what ways do you feel alumni can support the University?

- Use as a prompt for different types of support
  - Spoken in a class?
  - Referred a student?
  - Attended an event?
  - Volunteered in any way?
  - Made a monetary gift?
  - Offered an internship?
  - Hired a graduate?

10. What do you think motivates alumni to support the University?

11. Do think alumni understand why support of their alma mater is important?

12. What do you think the Alumni Association Board of Directors or the Foundation Board of Directors can do to impact alumni support?

13. Do you think alumni are connected to the University as a whole or a particular area?

- Why?

14. What do you think alumni are most concerned about related to the University?

#### View of Loyalty

15. How would you define loyalty?

16. How do you think loyalty to the institution is created?

17. When do you think loyalty is formed?

18. What do you think are traits that are exhibited by a loyal alumnus?

19. In what ways do you think the relationship alumni have with their alma mater changes over time?

20. When did you first commit to giving back to the University?

- What motivated you?

### Wrap up

21. Is there anything else I should know about your views regarding this topic?

### Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to visit with me on this topic. I will be sending you some of my thoughts from this interview and a copy of the transcript for your review. When you receive it please review it and let me know if you feel it is an accurate representation of our discussion here today.

I will be providing a copy of this study to anyone that is interested. Since you were involved in this study would you like to receive a copy of the research?

- If yes
  - I will confirm their contact information
  - And let them know that it will be sent to them before the end of the year
- If no
  - If you change your mind just let me know

If at any point you have additional questions about this study please let me know. Here is a card with my contact information in case you need to reach me.

Again, thank you for taking part in this study

Appendix E  
Questions that Answer Each Research Question  
For Data Analysis

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### *Focus Group*

Focus Group Questions	Research Questions
1. Tell us your name, the year you graduated, and how long you have served on the board.	
2. What motivated you to serve on the board?	2, 7
3. How would you rate the value and quality of the education the University provides?	3, 5, 6
4. What role do you believe student involvement plays in the development of alumni loyalty?	3, 5, 6
5. What role do you think the relationships alumni form while on campus plays in the development of Loyalty?	3, 5
6. When you were students did you know about alumni and the alumni association?	7
7. As a student did you ever consider giving back to the institution?	7
8. How do you believe philanthropic tendencies are instilled?	2, 3, 5, 6
9. In what ways do you feel alumni can support the University?	2, 7
10. What do you think motivates alumni to support the University?	2, 7
11. Do think alumni understand why support of their alma mater is important?	7
12. What do you think the Alumni Association or Foundation Board can do to impact alumni support?	6, 7
13. Do you think alumni are connected to the University as a whole or a particular area?	3, 5, 6, 7
14. What do you think alumni are most concerned about related to the University?	5, 7
15. How would you define loyalty?	1
16. How do you think loyalty to the institution is created?	5
17. When do you think loyalty is formed?	4
18. What do you think are traits that are exhibited by a loyal alumnus?	2, 7
19. In what ways do you think the relationship alumni have with their alma mater changes over time?	5, 7
20. When did you first commit to giving back to the University?	2, 7

*Interview Questions*

Interview Questions	Research Questions
1. Tell me about yourself?	
2. Why did you choose to attend the University, and was it what you expected?	3, 5
3. Tell me about your time on campus.	3, 6
4. How many years were you on campus	3, 6
5. What was your academic experience like?	3, 5
6. How would you rate the value and quality of the education you received?	3, 5, 6
7. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?	3, 5
8. What were your interactions with faculty and staff like?	3, 5, 6
9. Do you have any faculty who stand out in your mind?	3, 6
10. What were your interactions with other students like?	3, 5, 6
11. Do you think your peers had a similar or different experience than you did?	3, 6, 7
12. How did you pay for college?	3, 5, 6, 7
13. Do you think you changed while attending the institution?	3, 4, 5
14. What three things were you most satisfied with from the University?	3, 6
15. What three suggestions would you give that would have made your University experience better?	3, 6, 7
16. When you were a student what did you know about alumni and the alumni association?	7
17. As a student did you ever consider giving back to the institution?	7
18. Tell me about your experiences as an alumnus of the University.	2, 4, 5, 7
19. Do you support the University?	2, 7
20. What about your undergraduate experience impacted this decision to support or not support the University?	3, 7
21. Do you feel connected to the University as a whole, to a particular part, or not at all?	3, 5, 7
22. What do you currently like most about the University?	7
23. What do you currently like least about the University?	7
24. Do you feel you have an emotional attachment to the University?	2, 4, 5
25. How do you define loyalty?	1
26. Would you describe yourself as a loyal alumnus?	2, 7
27. What do you think are traits that are exhibited by a loyal alumnus?	2, 7
28. How do you feel that your relationship with the University will change over time?	2, 7

Appendix F  
Informed Consent Form

## INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

**Identification of Researchers:** This research is being done by Jenne Vanderbout, a graduate student with the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department at the University of Missouri –Columbia.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research project is to determine the impact of the undergraduate experience on the development of alumni loyalty with a focus on how and when alumni loyalty is formed.

**Request for Participation:** I am inviting you to participate in this research project. It is your decision on whether you would like to participate. Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will not affect access to services for the institution. Refusal to participate in the study will not be conveyed to anyone. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind. Similarly, you have the right to refuse to answer any question at any time without penalty of any kind. Any person who does choose to withdraw from the study will have their record of involvement destroyed. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may withdraw your data at any time of the study. Once you turn in your responses, I the researcher is the only one that will know what your responses were.

**Exclusions:** You must have completed your undergraduate degree at the University of Central Missouri.

**Description of Research Method:** This research project involves completing a short survey. The study will require that you participate in an interview or focus group regarding the University, your attitudes, and undergraduate and alumni experiences with the University. The interview will last between thirty minutes to one hour. The Focus group will last about an hour. Both the interview and the focus group will be tape recorded in order to maintain accurate records of what is said. If you would like to know the results of this research project, please contact me, Jenne Vanderbout via e-mail at [vanderbout@ucmo.edu](mailto:vanderbout@ucmo.edu) or 6600-441-7897. If you have questions about the project, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson via e-mail at [hutchinson@ucmo.edu](mailto:hutchinson@ucmo.edu) or telephone at (660) 543-4720.

**Privacy:** Every effort will be taken to guard anonymity and confidentiality throughout all phases of the study. Your identity will be coded as a mixture of numbers. Jenne Vanderbout will be the only person who has access to your personal information during all phases of this study.

**Explanation of Risks:** The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.



**Explanation of Benefits:** The benefits of this research project will be to share information relative to the impact the undergraduate experience has on the development of alumni loyalty, and assist administrators to assess programs in order to impact the development of alumni loyalty in order to increase alumni support to the institution.

**Questions about Your Rights:** If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri-Columbia Institutional Research Board at (573) 882-9585.

The above information was explained to me in full. All of my questions have been answered regarding this research study. By signing below I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature:

Date Signed:

Researcher Signature:

Date Signed:

Would you like to receive a summary of the results and/or a copy of any publication that come

out as a result of this study? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Appendix G  
Interview and Focus Group  
Participant Information

## INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

### *Individual Interview Participants*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>College</b>
D	1	F	AL	2007	Science and Technology
D	2	M	MO	1970	Business Administration
D	3	F	MD	1992	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
D	4	M	CA	1959	Science and Technology
D	5	M	CT	1972	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
D	6	F	MO	1947	Education
D	7	F	MO	2000	Business Administration
D	8	F	MO	1974	Education
D	9	F	KS	1980	Education
D	10	M	MO	1990	Health and Human Services
D	11	M	MO	1951	Education
D	12	M	MO	1965	Health and Human Services
D	13	M	MO	1966	Science and Technology
D	14	M	MO	1983	Business Administration
D	15	F	GA	1989	Science and Technology
ND	1	F	DC	2002	Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
ND	2	F	MO	2010	Business Administration
ND	3	M	MO	1961	Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
ND	4	M	CA	1987	Health and Human Services
ND	5	M	WA	1973	Science and Technology
ND	6	M	FL	2005	Science and Technology
ND	7	F	MA	1969	Education
ND	8	F	MO	1988	Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
ND	9	F	MO	1997	Education
ND	10	M	MO	1995	Business Administration
ND	11	F	CA	1958	Education
ND	12	F	MO	1970	Health and Human Services
ND	13	F	MO	199	Health and Human Services
ND	14	M	MO	1982	Science and Technology
ND	15	M	MO	1972	Science and Technology

*Focus Group Participants*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Years Served</b>
AB	1	F	KS	1994	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	1
AB	2	F	MO	2000	Business Administration	3
AB	3	M	MO	1977	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	4
AB	4	F	MO	1987	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	5
AB	5	M	IL	1969	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	2
AB	6	M	MO	1989	Education	1
AB	7	F	MO	1983	Education	4
AB	8	F	MO	1974	Education	6
FB	1	M	MO	1980	Business Administration	1
FB	2	F	MO	1975	Business Administration	11
FB	3	M	MO	1957	Business Administration	11
FB	4	M	MO	1980	Business Administration	6
FB	5	M	MO	1966	Business Administration	4
FB	6	M	WI	1967	Business Administration	38
FB	7	M	TX	1975	Health and Human Services	6
FB	8	F	CA	1975	Science and Technology	1
FB	9	F	MO	0	Science and Technology	6

## VITA

Jenne Vanderbout was born in Portland, Oregon on March 15, 1973. She attend elementary through high school in Portland, and graduated for Grover Cleveland High school in 1991. She attended Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon, and received her Bachelor of Science in Education (1996). While attending Western Oregon Jenne become involved in campus life working in housing first as a Resident Assistant and then a Residence Hall Director. Following graduation she worked full time for three years as a Resident Director and Student Activities Assistant at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. In 2001 Jenne earned her Master of Art in Student Development Administration from Seattle University in Seattle, Washington. While attending school in Seattle Jenne worked in the Student Activities office at Seattle University and Highline Community College. Following the completion of her M.A. Jenne accepted a position at the University of Central Missouri working with student leadership and campus programming in the Campus Activities office. In 2004 she moved to the Office of Alumni Relations and Development, and currently serves as the Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving programs. Shortly after moving to Missouri in 2001 Jenne met her husband, Doug Harris. They reside in Warrensburg with their two dogs and enjoy traveling and spending time outdoors.