

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

Jenne L. Vanderbout

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

## 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.