

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND GIVING BEHAVIORS AMONG DISTANCE
LEARNING ALUMNI AT A MAJOR SOUTHEASTERN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

With the number of alumni of distance programs increasing, and the decline of public funding for higher education continuing, overlooking engaging these constituents both as active members within the alumni community and as donors will likely be progressively detrimental to institutions as time progresses. The purpose of this study was to investigate how alumni of distance programs at a public flagship university behave with regards to organizational identity and the supportive behaviors of promotion and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the role of the elements of perceived institutional prestige and satisfaction in influencing organizational identity in the population of distance alumni. Also, the study explored the potential effect of demographic factors on the organizational identity of distance alumni. This study employed both survey research methods and utilized institutional data housed within the Office of Advancement to answer the research questions.

The overarching finding of this study is that distance alumni do have significant organizational identity to the institution with similar results to previous research conducted with traditional alumni. The supportive behaviors of financial giving and promoting the institution are influenced by the organizational identity of distance alumni. Additionally, the elements of institutional prestige and satisfaction are influencing factors on organizational identity of distance alumni. Other elements, including age, college of graduation, level of degree, and holding multiple degrees from the institution, were found to impact levels of organizational identity in distance alumni.

Findings suggest the institution could benefit from devoting strategic resources to developing exceptional distance degree programs for current students, while also exploring facilitating meaningful engagement and community for both current distance students and alumni of distance programs in order to raise organizational identity in the distance population. Additionally, soliciting distance alumni with appropriate giving initiatives could reduce the number of non-donors.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Andrew. Through this entire journey he has been there with words of encouragement and emotional support. Making it through this dissertation was definitely a team effort. Andrew, thank you for all sacrifices you made for me to make it this far. This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents, Mark and Debbie Terry, and my grandmother Mary Helen Terry. Without their love, support, and encouragement over many years, I would not be where I am today. Dad, thanks for always believing in me and pushing me to achieve. A big thanks to Mom and Nanny for leading by example as strong women who never shied away from math or technology.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Over the last decade, the number of non-traditional college students, defined as age 25 and above and not attending face-to-face classes full time, has dramatically increased. Non-traditional students comprise the fastest growing percentage of collegiate student enrollment and comprise 36% of 2009 postsecondary college enrollments (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Having often delayed college, these non-traditional students attend courses part time, work full time while enrolled in school, have dependents, and may be single parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Non-traditional students overwhelmingly utilize distance delivery channels such as online, evening, weekend, and hybrid courses. In 2007-08, 78% of those enrolled in distance degree programs were age 24 and older, while 55.1% had one or more dependents and 61.5% were employed full time (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In fall 2012 the U.S. Department of Education estimated 5.47 million undergraduate and graduate students participated in distance education in the United States, with 2.64 million exclusively taking distance courses (Kena et al., 2014). In surveying higher education institutions in 2013, Allen and Seaman found that 86.5% of the 2,082 institutions that responded offered online courses and 62.5% offered fully online degree programs. Clinefelter and Aslanian (2014), in a yearly study of 1,500 fully online students, found that the vast majority (88%) were pursuing a degree of some type (associate, baccalaureate, or graduate), with business being the

most popular major for both graduate and undergraduate students. Experiencing personal events that prevented completing a classroom-based program was the largest reason students chose to enroll in online programs, and overall institutional reputation (25%) was the top reason for selecting one online institution over another, only slightly edging out the cost of tuition and fees (24%). If their chosen online program had not been available, only 30% “probably” or “definitely” would have considered a hybrid/low residency program, and only 35% would have considered a traditional classroom program.

In comparing the learning experience in the traditional classroom to the experience online, 90% of respondents indicated the online experience was the same or better. A meta-analysis of online learning research studies found that students who completed all or some of their courses online performed modestly better than those who took the same course through face-to-face instruction (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). Research indicates that satisfaction among online students has also been found to exceed that of students in face-to-face classroom settings (Arbaugh, 2000). These students appear to be overwhelmingly seeking out online programs, and finding their learning experience to be valuable. While distance degree programs are often associated with for-profit schools, many “traditional” public and private non-profit universities are experiencing large gains enrolling distance students as well. In 2012, 27% of all undergraduates enrolled in a distance degree program attended a public or private nonprofit institution (Kena et al., 2014).

Concurrent to the rise in non-traditional students and distance education channels, public colleges and universities have been experiencing a dramatic reduction in state and federal funding. Between 2007 and 2012, 48 states have cut appropriations to higher education, while only two increased funding. In addition, 15 states have decreased funding by 15% or more

(Malcolm & McMinn, 2013). Additional revenue sources, such as private support from alumni, have become increasingly important to maintain both public and private institutions' budgets. While governmental funding has decreased, the recession of the late 2000s in the United States has reduced private gifts as well. The greatest share of individual donations comes from alumni, with the majority of gifts applied towards current operations rather than capital expenditures (Kaplan, 2016). Many higher education institutions have faced stagnant or declining giving from alumni during recent years. The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) estimated that from 2011 to 2012, the percentage of alumni making gifts to higher education institutions fell from 9.5 to 9.2 percent (Kaplan, 2016). Since CASE reported an alumni giving percentage of 9.8 in 2010, this suggests a downward trend in recent years. However, the strong stock market conditions of 2014 brought both a rise in endowment levels and an increase of 7.3% in charitable contributions to a total of \$40.38 billion, the highest recorded year since the survey began in 1957 (Kaplan, 2016). However, in contrast to higher overall giving, alumni participation rates continue to decline slightly (Kaplan, 2016).

Clinefelter and Aslanian (2014) posit that online learning allows institutions to serve larger numbers of students at a lower cost, and that this learning delivery mode actually provides an enhanced learning experience for students. In the current climate of decreasing resources and funding, the possibility of serving learner needs while actually reducing expenses has many institutions looking to online learning as a potential way to reduce costs and buffer the effect of uncertain student enrollments. However, the effects on long term alumni relationships and giving behaviors of online graduates remain unknown. As distance education was beginning to become commonplace, David Schejbal (2002), associate provost and director of continuing education at University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, predicted in an interview with *Distance*

Education Report, “It is important that universities look at distance education and giving, or 30 years down the road they are going to get caught.” Even though distance alumni giving may provide a significant revenue stream for modern universities, little academic research has explored the potential differences in giving habits of the traditional and non-traditional student populations (Hurst, 2008; Lesht & Schejbal, 2002; Johnson, 2013; Moore, 2014; Whitby, 2014). While distance learning students may not have had the traditional on campus experience, they do wish to remain close to their alma mater with respect to their sense of belonging, attachment, satisfaction, and willingness to give as alumni (Moore, 2014). As these alumni mature, awareness of appropriate strategies to maximize giving will be increasingly important for university advancement departments (Black, Dawson, & Ferdig, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The decline in public funding presents a major crisis for American higher education institutions, and alumni giving has provided a large percentage of private support. Alumni of distance education programs present enormous potential to institutions as a revenue source. With the number of alumni of distance programs increasing, overlooking engaging these constituents both as active members within the alumni community and as donors will likely be progressively detrimental to institutions as time progresses. However, little existing research exists regarding how the distance student population will behave as alumni. This gap in knowledge may prevent institutions from implementing effective giving strategies targeting distance alumni.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how alumni of distance programs at a public flagship university behave with regards to organizational identity and the supportive behaviors of

promotion and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the role of the elements of perceived institutional prestige and satisfaction in influencing organizational identity in the population of distance alumni. Also, the study explored the potential effect of demographic factors on the organizational identity of distance alumni. In addition to the academic research contributions of this study, the results provide discernible recommendations to fundraisers and university administrators who seek to better understand the organizational identity of distance alumni and how to increase financial giving and alumni involvement among this donor base.

Significance of the Study

As the percentage of distance students grows, so does their share of the alumni base at higher education institutions. With higher education funding in crisis, it becomes more vital to engage these alumni in institutional giving. Understanding how and why these individuals give is critical to effectively reaching out to them as donors. This study builds upon and expands knowledge in this area.

Assumptions of the Study

This study made the following assumptions. The first assumption is that the institutional data obtained from the Office of Advancement at the school in question are sufficiently accurate and updated. The second assumption is that the participants responded honestly to the survey questions.

Theory

While a number of theories have been proposed and analyzed in the area of philanthropic giving, the area of organizational identification seems especially appropriate as a framework for studying the population of distance learning alumni. These alumni have a unique “college experience” and a potentially distinctive relationship to the institution. The theory of

organizational identification is based in social identity theory. Social identity theory, established by Tajfel and Turner (1981), introduced the concept of a social identity, the knowledge of one's membership in a social group, and the related value and significance placed on that membership. The specific type of social identification where an individual defines him or herself in terms of membership within a particular organization is defined as organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). While the majority of organizational identification research has been conducted with regards to the relationship between employees and employer, there have been a number of studies that indicate the relationship between alumni and their higher education institution acts in a similar manner (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003; Etzelmueller, 2014; Kim, Chang, & Jae Ko, 2010; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Porter, Hartman, & Johnson, 2011; Stephenson, 2013; Stephenson & Yerger, 2015).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What is the relationship between organizational identification and supportive behaviors, including financial donations and promotion of the institution, by distance alumni?
2. Is there a difference in organizational identity between distance alumni who are donors and those who are non-donors?
3. What is the relationship between degree of organizational identity and donor/non-donor status of distance alumni?
4. What are the effects of organizational prestige and satisfaction on organizational identification among distance alumni?

5. What is the relationship between demographic variables and organizational identification of distance alumni?

Methods

This study employed both survey research methods and utilized institutional data housed within the Office of Advancement. Participants were alumni who graduated from distance degree programs from the years 2009 - 2014 at a major southeastern public university. Mael & Ashforth's (1992) instrument was used to measure organizational identification. Arnett et al.'s (2003) perceived prestige scale, adapted from Mael & Ashforth's (1992) instrument, and their promotion instrument were also utilized. In addition, Wilkins, Butt, Kratochvil, and Balakrishnan's (2015) satisfaction instrument, originally used with current students, was used with slight verbiage adaptations to enhance the applicability for alumni respondents.

Limitations

The following limitations applied to this study. First, the research is cross sectional, and thus examines one subset of the population at a specific period of time. In this case, caution should be used regarding inferences in causation. In addition, data collection from a single institution presents additional limitations in assumptions regarding the larger population. Because the sample consisted of alumni who responded to an institutional survey, bias towards the institution may be present, as evidenced by 34.4% of the eligible population being donors, but a 53.4% donor rate among of the survey participants. In addition, unique characteristics regarding the institution itself, such as the emphasis on NCAA athletics, may have influenced results in ways that are not applicable to institutions without large athletic programs.

Definition of Terms

Alumnus: An individual who has received a degree and graduated from a higher education institution. Alumni is the plural form of the term alumnus.

Blended Program: For purposes of this study, a program of study specifically designed and promoted to distance students that supplements some class meetings with a number of electronic formats. Blended programs often consist of both blended courses and online courses. A typical blended course at this institution may meet in person once a month while the rest of the course is achieved online.

Distance Alumnus: For purposes of this study, distance alumni have graduated from a program designated as a distance learning degree program. These programs consist of online and blended courses.

Non-traditional Student: A student who is 25 years of age or older upon entering or returning to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Online Program: For purposes of this study, a program of study specifically designed and promoted to distance students that can be completed entirely online, with no in class meetings.

Organizational Identification: A specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization.

Perceived Institutional Prestige: An individual's beliefs about the perception of the institution held by others.

Promotion: The act of supporting and publicizing the organization to others.

Satisfaction: For purposes of this study, satisfaction is defined as the fulfillment or confirmation of one's educational expectations.

Supportive Behaviors: For purposes of this study, the term supportive behaviors is defined to denote the acts of donating money, and promoting the institution.

Traditional Student: An individual aged 18-24 years old, first-time baccalaureate degree-seeking at a four-year higher education institution, and beginning and completing a degree in four to six years.

Summary

This study examined distance alumni's organizational identification to the institution, and how that identification influences the supportive behaviors of promotion and financial giving to the institution. Additionally, the study investigated how satisfaction and perceived institutional prestige shape organizational identity in this group of alumni. Understanding how alumni of distance programs view their sense of self with regards to the institution and how that affects financial donations will allow university advancement offices and administrators opportunities to tailor campaigns to a growing constituency. Employing existing survey instruments previously used with traditional alumni and student organizational identity research (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Wilkins et al., 2015), this study will expand upon previous research by examining factors that may be unique to distance graduates. Data from both the survey and advancement information system data tied to respondents contributed to answering the research questions.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed review of the literature regarding organizational identification of university alumni, distance students in higher education, and the intersection of those two topics pertaining to distance program alumni giving and attitudes. Research related to organizational identification in higher education is explored, including the theoretical background, an in-depth review of Mael and Ashforth's 1992 study, additional research in higher education, organizational identification of virtual employees, and physical space as it relates to identification. The literature review then examines additional determinants of giving in higher education including demographic factors, institutional characteristics, student experience and satisfaction, and alumni engagement. Finally, existing research related to the progression of distance education, distance alumni fund-raising, and related distance student research findings is discussed.

Organizational Identification

Background. Organizational identification has been studied for a number of years within the context of relationship between employee and employer, and further explored framed within the relationship of students and alumni to academic institutions (Arnett et al., 2003; Etzelmueller, 2014; Johnson, 2013; Kim, Chang, & Jae Ko, 2010; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013). When contrasted with other variables impacting work behavior,

such as ability, satisfaction, and motivation, the concept of organizational identification has seen much less research until recently. Although previously identified, researchers in a number of fields, including organizational behavior, social psychology, and communication began placing an emphasis on organizational intelligence in the late 1980s (Ricketta, 2005). After Ashforth and Mael's (1989) work outlining the relevance of these theories to organizational behavior research, the focus on this construct in research significantly increased (Ricketta, 2005). In addition, during this time there was concurrently occurring research from a social identity perspective and in communication research (Ricketta, 2005).

Mael and Ashforth (1992) define organizational identification as "a specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization." The definition proposed by Mael and Ashforth is narrower than some other proposed definitions, and this conceptualization from the social identity perspective has garnered mainstream consensus (He & Brown, 2013). The process of organizational identification occurs as the individual perceives oneness with the organization, which acts as a salient social category, and feels that he or she belongs to it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Organizational identification is important to institutions, including those in higher education, for a number of reasons. Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) describe four specific reasons why this is true: it is important to the concept of self-identity in that it is a significant way in which people come to define themselves, make sense of their place in the larger world and appropriately navigate their environment; identifying with and feeling part of the larger group is a principal human need, and identifying with an organization fulfills this need, as well as the need to enhance self; organizational identification is associated with a number of critical organizational outcomes, including satisfaction, performance and employee retention; and

organizational identification has been linked to behaviors, including leadership, perceptions of justice and the meaning of work (Ashforth et al., 2008). In the higher education environment specifically, increased organizational identification has been shown to play a role in numerous areas across the student life cycle. With current students, organizational identification contributes to academic achievement, retention (Wilkins et al., 2015), and satisfaction (Wilkins & Huisman, 2013). In the area of university graduates, organizational identification has shown to influence financial giving, alumni involvement, and promotion of the school to others (Arnett et al., 2003; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013).

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) research was the first to apply the concept of organizational identification in a higher education context. This study examines the applicability of organizational identification to the connection between alumni and the institution from which they graduated. The authors' setting for the study was an all-male college in the northeastern United States. The authors proposed a number of organizational and individual antecedents that contributed to the level of organizational identification, which correlated to positive outcomes including financial support, recruitment of future students, attendance at events, and positive word of mouth support for the university. The organizational antecedents hypothesized were organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, interorganizational competition, and intraorganizational competition. The individual antecedents hypothesized were organizational tenure, recency of membership, number of comparable organizations joined, existence of a mentor, satisfaction with the organization, and sentimentality.

Mael and Ashforth's research. Mael and Ashforth (1992) mailed surveys to a random sample of 700 of 2000 alumni. 279 usable responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 47%. The results indicated that identification was positively associated with the outcomes of

supporting the organization, which included financial support, recommending the school to their own child or others, and participation in organizational functions. Organizational antecedents of organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and intraorganizational competition were identified as being associated with organizational identification. The results also indicated that organizational tenure, satisfaction with the organization, and sentimentality were also associated with organizational identification.

As the first researchers applying organizational identification to an individual's relationship with a higher education institution, Mael and Ashforth (1992) provided an influential contribution to the organizational identification literature. Their 1992 results are considered an frequently cited study and have been cited in 3,085 scholarly articles per a Google Scholar search in March 2016. The study thoroughly detailed the construct of identification, and provided theoretically based antecedents and outcomes. In addition, and possibly most importantly, the organizational identification instrument has been used and replicated in a number of other studies. The identification and prestige scales are both easily adaptable and reliable ($=.87$ and $.77$ respectively). While the scale was originally constructed for an all-male religious institution, its applicability for other groups has been demonstrated, and it is highly regarded as the best option to measure identification (Riketta, 2005).

Research in higher education. While the concept of organizational identification is most often associated with research involving employee/employer relationships, there is also extensive research over the past twenty-five years within the area of higher education. The majority of these studies examine aspects related to traditional university elements, some others have concentrated on NCAA athletics, and there are a few that examine identification as it relates to alternative higher education constituents.

Traditional higher education alumni. In addition to Mael and Ashforth's seminal work, there have been further studies in the area of organizational identification of traditional university alumni. McAlexander, Koenig, and Schouten (2006) developed and validated a model for the higher education brand community specifically created for university advancement and development. Research was adapted from the authors' prior work on brand community within the automobile industry (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). The survey instrument captured if alumni's feelings about their degrees formed part of their extended self and also measured relationships between the alumnus and the brand, institution, and other alumni. The research found statistically significant results to support brand community integration having a positive effect on loyalty related attitudes and intentions. Additionally, McAlexander and Koenig (2001) examined the university experience and its effect on the university/alumni relationship with a lens focused on the implications for marketers and institutional fundraisers. Overall, alumni's relationships with the university were strongly influenced by institutional relationships and experiences formed while students. Wearing university-themed clothing, engaging as alumni, making financial donations, and encouraging their children to attend the institution were all affected by their current view of the university and shaped by their university experience. Results indicated that the "fun" aspect of the college experience was not the only dimension that has an impact on loyalty. Similar to recollections of those involved in activities such as mountain climbing, alumni found value in reflecting on the variable stresses of the college experience and the personal growth from pushing one's limits. There was mixed support for the hypothesis that the passage of time would not significantly influence the present relationship with the institution, as results indicated the current relationship can atrophy as time passes, but the likelihood of monetary donations increases with time. The finding that these

relationships have the potential to decay emphasizes the importance of maintaining active relationships with alumni.

Arnett et al. (2003) examined the applicability of an organizational identity salience model focusing on the context of higher education marketing and fundraising. The basis for the model was identity theory and social exchange theory. The study analyzed four factors that influence identity salience: participation, reciprocity, prestige, and satisfaction. It also included factors that the literature suggests play a role in donations as controls, including higher income of the donor, and the perceived financial need of the program/institution. Questionnaires were sent to alumni from a large southwestern state university from three different classes (1954, 1974, and 1994) which tested the identity salience model, adapted from a blood donor identity salience scale by Callero (1985), a prestige of the university scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), and a satisfaction scale based on the consumer satisfaction scale developed by Westbrook and Oliver (1981). The results provide evidence that identity salience does play a relationship in the context of higher education marketing by mediating the relationships between relationship-inducing behaviors (participation and prestige) and supportive behaviors (donating and promoting). The authors suggest that strengthening ties with the organization, allowing for more involvement from alumni, and higher prestige increase identity salience. Results were mixed with regards to satisfaction, and the authors felt that there may be too many elements that can conflict with regards to satisfaction (institution level, program level, social experiences) to accurately predict identity salience.

Using a conceptually similar model to Mael and Ashforth (1992), Porter et al. (2011) explored a number of factors related to both university and athletic areas that work to positively enhance alumni identification. Findings include that university identification positively

influenced giving to all measured areas, along with promotion, both perceived academic and athletic prestige, that college identification performs a mediation role between select college experiences and alumni giving, and that the level of participation the alumni had in student organizations while attending college was the most robust factor impacting positive alumni identification.

Hanson (2000) surveyed alumni from the University of North Dakota, examining a number of demographic elements and alumni characteristics, including identification, satisfaction, organizational prestige, and promotion of the institution, to determine their relationship with financial giving. Adapted scales from Mael and Ashforth (1992) were used for the constructs of identification, organizational prestige, and promotion. The results indicated that there is only minimal correlation between the supportive behaviors of financial giving and promoting the university, and that only a few variables were significant in predicting both donors and promoters. Those who promoted the institution tended to be more recent graduates, lived in the state, and displayed high levels of organizational prestige. Organizational prestige, identification, and years since graduation were the largest variables impacting likelihood of being a donor.

Etzelmueller (2014) conducted an exploratory study of 14 participants, who represented the alumni of a number of schools, to explore alumni identification through face-to-face interviews. The findings highlighted that both positive academic and social experiences as a student create a strong connection to the institution. In addition, the results indicated that higher satisfaction as an undergraduate student allowed for an improved opportunity to create a strong long term relationship with the institution (Etzelmueller, 2014).

Research conducted on traditional alumni at a mid-sized public U.S. higher education institution supported the inclusion of brand identification, defined in the study interchangeably with organizational identification, into present donor models (Stephenson, 2013). Stephenson's study found that brand identification is a valuable concept in understanding alumni behaviors and was found to be statistically significant and positively related to choice to donate, donor level, number of donations, promotion, and competitive attitude. Several unanticipated results emerged in this study surrounding prestige, participation, and college of attendance variables. While prestige is documented in the literature as a driving factor of donor behavior (Holmes, 2009; McDearmon, 2010; Sung & Yang, 2009), prestige had little effect, did not add value to the donor models, and was excluded from the hypothesis testing. Potential reasons proposed for this were that the institutions were not comparable, or possibly that the institution in question was not viewed as highly prestigious, decreasing competition with other schools.

Participation also yielded unexpected results. While the literature suggested there would be positive association with participation, as individuals associated with higher level of involvement had more opportunities to donate throughout the institution (Clotfelter, 2003; Monks, 2003), participation was not statistically significant related to brand image in this study. Another discrepancy between the literature and results of Stephenson's study was academic major and college of attendance as they related to donation behaviors. Previous research found differences across major and college of attendance (Belfield & Beney, 2000; Marr, Mullin, & Siegfried, 2005; Monks, 2003; Okunade & Berl, 1997), but the college of attendance variable did not produce statistically significant results and did not improve the explanatory power of the models in the various multiple regression models (Stephenson, 2013).

Recent research has begun to delve further into concepts such as “satisfaction” and “student experience.” Stephenson and Yerger (2015) found that the satisfaction construct can be broken out and assessed categorically into student affairs-related areas, including campus events and activities, and campus resource related areas including libraries, technology, and housing. Both subcategories of satisfaction were found to be statistically significant to identification and supportive behaviors. Measuring organizational identification using an adapted version of Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) instrument, Koenig-Lewis, Asaad, Palmer, and Petersone (2015), examined differences in alumni’s recalled social and academic experience. Alumni having strong ties with the institution were more likely over time to identify with the recalled academic experience as students, while those with weak ties were more likely to identify with recalled social experiences.

In an exploratory study using in-depth interviews with social media strategists at eight highly ranked universities, Peruta, Helm, and Benson (2015) began to examine the effect communications on social media such as Facebook can have as a strategy to increase alumni identification. Unlike traditional forms of communication, the authors posit that social media offers the potential for mass communication without being inherently impersonalized. They maintain that instead, social media channels visually create a sense of community. The results of the interviews showed a varying level of strategy utilizing social media at institutions. The most effective social media strategies for creating identification were based on the themes of unifying imagery, pride points, relevance, and/or nostalgia.

Alternative higher education alumni. As there is very little existing research related to the organizational identification of distance alumni, research related to other alumni groups not considered typical were examined. While results from this research may not translate directly to

the experiences and identification of distance students, alternative alumni groups do illustrate that organizational identity may be a relevant construct for groups of alumni which do not fit the traditional college experience.

Commuter students. Commuter students are one group that may share characteristics of distance students. Kretovics (2003) contends that student services professionals should include distance education students, who “commute” to campuses virtually, under the umbrella of commuter students as they are often most likely to be non-traditional students and share similar issues, such as lower retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus (2010) examined organizational identification and likeliness to contribute to the alumni association at a midsized state university with a large percentage of commuter students. The results of this study were mixed compared with previous research. The results did suggest that the institutional antecedents of distinctness and prestige, and the individual antecedents of number of institutions attended and living near the campus did have a positive, significant relationship with organizational identification. However, tenure at the institution, working compared with non-working students, and on-campus involvement all had a weak relationship. Possibilities for the conflicting nature of these findings included the fact that students were not especially involved as a whole in following the athletic programs on campus and the large percentage of commuter students attending the school. The results only indicated partial support for identification and joining the alumni association. The authors also surmised that the low involvement rates throughout campus may also produce a lack of financial support for the alumni association, despite identification among alumni.

African-American alumni. Another group that may help understand distance alumni behavior is African American alumni. Drezner (2009) used case study methodology to explore

social exchange theory and organizational identification with relation to young alumni of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Through interviews and advisors involved with the National Pre-Alumni Council (NPAC) of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), Drezner explored the culture of giving cultivated through the NPAC, which not only encompasses the elements of social exchange and organizational identification but also instills the concept of racial uplift, which is not accounted for in these theories. Drezner asserts that traditional theories do not account for the unique aspects of HBCUs.

Nonprofit organizations. Organizational identification has also been examined within the context of nonprofit membership, which may share characteristics to the alumni/university relationship. Building on the instrument from Mael and Ashforth (1992), Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn (1995) proposed and tested a model of organizational identification for members of a large art museum. The findings show that identification is positively related to prestige, donation activity, length of membership, visiting frequency, and confirmation that the museum's services are in line with member expectations.

Alumni and sports. One area of higher education that has received a unique focus in the identification literature is the effect college athletics has on organizational identification and charitable giving to the institution. A seminal study, *Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies* (Cialdini et al., 1976) examined students' behaviors as related to the football team's performance, including wearing more team apparel after wins, and increased use of the pronoun "we" to associate themselves with winning teams, but less so with losers. This research created the cornerstone of the now commonly referenced concept of Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRG), whereas self esteem and self concept can be enhanced through identification with another's success or a group's success and glory which was not earned personally.

Mixed results have been found in the research related to college athletics identification and financial giving. Porter et al. (2011) found that even though university identification had a direct influence on giving to athletics, college identification did not mediate the direct effects of the presence of a football team, attending football games, and student involvement in giving to athletics. Also, the presence of a football team and attending football games had no impact on the level of identification that alumni feel towards the university. A study of Korean undergraduate students found that, consistent with previous studies regarding the element of prestige (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001), students' identification with both the school athletic program and the academic department was strongly related to how they believe outsiders view the athletic program and the academic department. The study also indicated that students' identification to both athletics and academics at the institution has strong effects on the overall identification with the university and intentions to support the university financially (Kim et al., 2010).

Current students. Organizational identification has also been studied as a predictor of feelings and behavior of current students, before they become alumni. Student achievement and satisfaction are areas where an association with identification has been studied. Student achievement and satisfaction are often linked, as students who achieve their scholarly goals are more likely to be satisfied with both their major program and the overall institution (Wilkins & Epps, 2011). In a study of business major undergraduates in the UK and UAE, Wilkins et al. (2015) found that compared with social identification, organizational identification is a stronger predictor of student commitment, achievement, and satisfaction. Previously, Wilkins and Huisman (2013) suggested there is a link between satisfaction and identification with the institution, as students who were satisfied engaged in a number of behaviors that benefited the

institution, including choosing to study at that school, promoting the institution, and positively interacting and involving themselves with the organization. As a construct, organizational identification is a more important and long lasting element for a student's future success compared to social identification, with university prestige, educational commitment required to graduate from a well-regarded institution, and student satisfaction with institutional reputation all possible factors influencing job prospects and success after graduation (Wilkins et al., 2015).

Using Mael and Ashforth's (1992) instrument, Lau (2013) examined how current college students' interactions with universities on Facebook may facilitate identification with the school as well as with other related groups (i.e. students, faculty, staff, major, alumni) within the institution. While frequency of Facebook access was not linked to identification, the data indicated that the number of Facebook friends also present at the same institution was a predictor of levels of identification.

Virtual employees and teams. While there has been little research into organizational identification in distance education, a number of studies have focused on identification levels among virtual employees and virtual teams as many corporate organizations significantly change their working environments. The array of innovative working arrangements, often referred to as virtual work, telework, telecommuting, remote work, or distributed work, is a revolutionary change in the daily experience of work. A key feature of these alternative working structures is the decentralization of employees from an office setting with coworkers and supervisors (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, 2012). This large change to the work environment fundamentally changes employees' interaction and engagement with the organization, despite often having the same general responsibilities (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008).

In many ways the experience of a virtual employee overlaps with that of a distance student. Both experience the same expectations as their traditional counterparts with regard to academic or job performance, but their entire experience of work or college has changed. The research into virtual work has begun to examine the organizational identity of virtual employees with findings that may have parallels into the experience of online students. The construct of organizational identification is an especially relevant factor in shaping virtual workers' behavior because by its nature, virtual workers must rely on psychological dimensions rather than visible dimensions of organizations to have meaning within an organization (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001).

The possibilities that technology offers with the expansive freedom in time and location of work may also contribute to increased psychological distance and detachment from an employer. Similar to distance students, virtual workers are often quite dispersed geographically and communicate primarily through technology with little to no face-to-face interaction with coworkers. Organizational members who are geographically remote often feel less loyal and connected to their organization (Kurland & Egan, 1999) and experience a feeling of isolation (Raghuram, Garud, Wiesenfeld, & Gupta, 2001; Rapp, Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2010). Additionally, the physical isolation of individuals increases the sense of professional isolation as members experience difficulty establishing a connection and feel lower levels of perceived respect within a professional community (Bartel et al., 2012). Because virtual employees are physically isolated, they may be viewed by themselves or others as marginal and less prototypical. Research suggests that group members who are less quintessential are also more self-aware about acceptance or status within the group, thus they are more likely to feel marginal and insecure compared with more prototypical group members (Baumeister & Leary, 1995;

Kramer, 1998; Moreland, 1985 as cited in Wiesenfeld, 2012). Similarly, non-traditional students may feel marginalized at traditional undergraduate centered schools and may not have the same student experiences available to them (Radcliffe, 2011).

Much like the “college experience,” which heavily relies on shared experiences and tradition as a major component in identification, the traditional workplace includes a number of organizational structures and practices that elicit visible signs of affiliation such as artifacts and symbols, including shared dress codes and language, signs and logos over doorways and on coffee mugs, architecture, as well as rituals and ceremonies including orientation programs, recognition ceremonies, and customs (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1998). Physical distance also prevents virtual workers from participating in the social experience common in a traditional working environment, which may cause employees to feel less involved (Kurland & Egan, 1999) and contribute to a lessening ability to form relationships (Merriman, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007), hindering connections and trust with organization members. While traditional organizations can depend on fairly clear and dependable factors to serve as connections between the employee and the corporation, the experience of virtual work makes these facets less available and less meaningful (Wiesenfeld et al., 1998). Townsend, Hendrickson and DeMarie (2002) found that support from senior leadership, employee involvement in content delivery, and standardization of access to technology across the organization will enhance adoption of virtual teams.

Organizations with virtual employees should find the construct of organizational identification important because it may provide them an opportunity to compensate for the loss of traditional means of facilitating cooperation, coordination, and effort among employees (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Since traditional means of creating and sustaining organizational

identification may not be available or relevant to virtual employees, virtual organizations may find themselves facing a conundrum. Virtual employees critically need to maintain organizational identification with the organization, but they are the least likely workers to be exposed to factors that have traditionally strengthened organizational identification (Wiesenfeld et al., 1998). As virtual work may require new models and factors for organizational identification, it is important to identify how organizational identification may differ between virtual and non-virtual employees (Wiesenfeld et al., 1998).

Research into virtual employees has examined several elements related to identification, including communication, affiliation, and work-based social support. Wiesenfeld et al. (1998) found that employees' virtual status was an important factor in how they built organizational identification and that electronic communication was a significant predictor of organizational identification among virtual employees. Virtual employees' need for affiliation and the level of work-based social support, defined as "the degree to which individuals perceive that they have positive social relationships with others in the workplace" (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Dormann & Zapf, 1999; Lim, 1997; Wanberg & Banas, 2000 as cited in Wiesenfeld et al., 2001), play an important role in predicting organizational identification. In addition, these two elements interact to influence identification such that managers may be able to strengthen identification among virtual employees who have a low need of affiliation and who are not motivated internally to have strong identification with the organization by providing high levels of social support. Additionally, results indicated that when perceived work-based social support is high, the need for affiliation is less important (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Virtual employees with high levels of perceived work-based social support feel viewed as true organization members by

others, including traditional employees, and feel socially integrated with the organization (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

Organizational identification and physical distance. Identification has shown to be a relevant construct even where the groups and categorization process were not based on physical proximity. Research (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1982) suggests that members may define themselves by psychological groups, in which members may define themselves in the same category, but have little to no contact with each other. A person with a rare disease may never meet another individual with the same condition, but still identify as being a member of the group of people who have the disease (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). That individuals have the propensity to identify even with groups with which they have no direct contact implies that features such as a need to belong may be driving forces in the identification process in these types of instances (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Stephenson (2013) suggests that while university alumni may not know any current faculty or students, or ever have interacted with them, they still define themselves related to their association with the institution. If these findings are applicable to distance alumni, this scenario may also yield identification, even though the alumnus had no physical contact with the institution as a student.

Giving in Higher Education

Overview. In the present day environment in higher education, institutions are being forced to identify new funding sources as they have experienced a sharp decrease in both governmental and corporate contributions (Kaplan, 2016). During the turbulent economic times of the “great recession,” institutions faced both decreased donations and lower endowment levels. However, the strong stock market conditions of 2014 did bring both a rise in endowment levels and an increase of 7.3% in charitable contributions to a total of \$40.38 billion, the highest

recorded year since the survey began in 1957 (Kaplan, 2016). Gifts to higher education institutions come primarily from alumni, other individual donors, corporations, and foundations. The greatest share of individual donations comes from alumni, with gifts allocated for student aid such as scholarships making up the largest category of endowment giving. However, in contrast to higher overall giving in 2014, alumni participation rates continue to decline slightly (Kaplan, 2016).

Additional predictors of alumni giving. While there has been little research into the specific area of non-traditional alumni giving, this is not true for alumni giving in general. In 2011, Bekkers and Wiepking conducted two literature reviews of over 500 empirical articles related to the predictors of charitable giving to distill out the major factors that influence giving. There have also been a multitude of studies within the area of traditional college alumni giving (Clotfelter, 2003; Srnka, Grohs, & Eckler, 2003). This research has produced a number of elements that are correlated with increased giving, including demographic factors, student experiences, satisfaction, and alumni engagement.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors. Numerous demographic factors have been examined to determine potential associations with increased giving levels. These demographic factors include income, age, gender, marital status, and current geographical distance to the institution. Predictably, income has been determined in numerous research studies to be an important factor in predicting charitable giving (Belfield & Beney, 2000; Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Clotfelter, 2003; Conner, 2005; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Skari, 2014; Young & Fischer, 1996). Meta-analysis of a number of studies shows that age positively affects giving, with some studies showing that after age 65 increased age decreases giving likeliness (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). Mixed results have been found with regards to the factors of gender, marital

status, and ethnicity (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). Studies have shown that living farther away from the institution decreases giving likeliness and amounts (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Conner, 2005; Holmes, 2009), while the opposite is true for alumni living in affluent neighborhoods within 250 miles from the institution (Holmes, 2009). Recent trends suggest that while the majority of online students (54%) are still enrolling at an institution less than 100 miles from where they live, they are increasingly willing to attend institutions farther away from home since this percentage is down from 80% in 2012 and 69% in 2013 (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2014).

Institutional characteristics. Research has revealed that characteristics related to the institution also play a role in alumni giving behaviors, including public or private classification, perceived educational quality, student body characteristics, and reputation (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Leslie & Ramey, 1988). Baade and Sundberg (1996) found that selectivity and quality are important institutional characteristics: a one percent increase in the fraction of students from the top ten percent of their high school class creates an estimated four tenths of one percent increase in gift per alum. The perceived need of the institution can also influence alumni giving (Hanson, 2000). When donors perceive their financial gifts will be used to meet significant needs of the institution, they prefer to give to higher education over other competing charitable opportunities (Hoyt, 2004).

Student experiences and satisfaction. Variables that relate to the experience traditional alumni had as students also contribute to the likeliness of giving, including relationships with faculty members, engagement while a student, financial aid and scholarship receipt, and satisfaction with the overall experience at the institution. A number of studies have shown that two of the strongest indicators for future alumni gifts are satisfaction with educational

experiences or positive emotional attachments/engagement with colleges or universities (Clotfelter, 2003; Gaier, 2001; Hoyt, 2004; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Monks, 2003; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Stutler & Calvario, 1996; Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007; Weerts & Ronca, 2007).

Strong relationships with faculty have shown to have an impact on students and alumni. Having had a faculty member take an interest in developing a mentor type relationship had a strong association with alumni reporting satisfaction with an a college experience, which also had an association with higher levels of alumni contributions (Clotfelter, 2003; Monks, 2003; Sun et al., 2007). In a study of students at a Korean university, actively communicating with faculty and the institution contributes to a higher level of perception of quality of the institution, and leads to students reporting greater intentions for alumni giving (Sung & Yang, 2009). In contrast, alumni who were involved in independent study or research made lower than average donations (Monks, 2003).

Research has found that student engagement, through activities including Greek membership, participation in athletics, community service, and student government, positively influences future involvement and giving as alumni (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Conner, 2005; Marr et al., 2005; Monks, 2003; Stutler & Calvario, 1996). In traditional alumni, these on campus experiences can contribute to strong social and emotional connections for alumni towards the institution (Hanson, 2000; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Stutler & Calvario, 1996). Satisfaction with student activities and experiences has been shown to directly relate to and influence alumni involvement (Drew-Branch, 2011; Stutler & Calvario, 1996). Additionally, area of study or academic major has been shown in some studies to contribute to differing giving behaviors. Statistically significant results have been shown across majors (Marr et al., 2005; Monks, 2003).

Research has also examined the factor financial aid may play in future giving. Initial studies did not differentiate between aid such as grants and scholarships, which do not have to be repaid, and student loans, which do have to be repaid (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2003). In contrast, more recent studies have differentiated between the two types of aid, and found that scholarships and grants correlate positively to alumni giving (Hoyt, 2004), while loans correlate negatively to alumni giving (Dugan, Mullin, & Siegfried, 2000; Marr et al., 2005; Monks, 2003). Research has also shown that involvement in student philanthropy programs, such as student alumni associations, positively impacts future giving (Conley, 1999; Friedmann, 2003; Gaier, 2001) and that student participation in institutional fundraising efforts during undergraduate years establishes a strong foundation for future involvement with the university (Nayman, Gianneschi, & Mandel, 1993).

An overarching theme throughout the literature on propensity and affinity for alumni giving is the element of satisfaction with the student experience and the institution. Even early in the student experience with the institution, feelings of student satisfaction can be cultivated, as the positive connections that institutions develop with students through enrollment can lead to supportive behaviors (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997). Research has found that satisfaction with the academic experience (Clotfelter, 2003; Hoyt, 2004; Monks, 2003) and the perceived quality of education received (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Conner, 2005; Hoyt, 2004; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Pearson, 1999) are important determinants of future alumni support. Leslie and Ramey (1988) found that institutional quality, quantified in terms of expenditures per student, had a positive impact on donor groups. Pearson (1999) found a strong association even among alumni who were “very satisfied” with their student experience, compared to those who were “satisfied,” in that they perceived greater value in their education,

had a stronger personal commitment to the institution and were more likely to be donors. Satisfaction was greater among those alumni who believed the best features of their education, such as positive advising experiences, access to the best classes and academic opportunities, and challenging but reachable goals, were deliberately crafted by the institution to increase the quality of education. Sun et al. (2007) report that alumni with greater levels of satisfaction were more inclined to give to the university. Satisfaction was greater among those alumni who felt pleased with their student experiences, believed that the university had impacted their career, and developed relationships with faculty and staff during their time at the institution. Monks (2003) found that satisfaction with the undergraduate experience was the most significant determinant of alumni donations, and that “respondents who reported that they are ‘very satisfied’ with their undergraduate experience gave over 2.6 times as much to their alma mater as alumni who were ‘ambivalent,’ ‘generally dissatisfied,’ or ‘very dissatisfied.’”

Recent research has begun to examine the elements that contribute to overall satisfaction. Stephenson and Yerger (2015) found that the satisfaction construct can be assessed categorically into student affairs-related areas including campus events and activities, and campus resource related areas including libraries, technology, and housing. Both subcategories of satisfaction were found to be statistically significant to donor outcomes. Ropp (2014) examined academic engagement variables, and found that alumni who received the needed academic support from the institution and were challenged academically were more likely to have feelings of satisfaction and were more likely to donate.

Alumni engagement. Alumni engagement, defined as the choice to remain connected to the institution after graduation, has been documented through numerous studies as another possible predictor of giving (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Hoyt, 2004; McAlexander & Koenig,

2001; Radcliffe, 2011; Young & Fischer, 1996). Drew-Branch (2011) found a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of donating one's time and the willingness to donate financially to the institution among alumni. Highly involved alumni, as both donors and volunteers, did not appear significantly different from nonsupporter alums with regards to their experience at the institution, however they were more likely to get involved after graduation and become engaged as alumni, initiating a lifelong relationship with the institution (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Alumni who are dissatisfied with the emphasis or issues surrounding the institution have been shown to give less (Monks, 2003).

Distance Students

Non-traditional distance students in higher education. Historically, higher education has been geared towards young adults in on campus settings. The first programs to reach out to older students were vocational programs in the early 20th century, and this practice expanded during and after WWII as many junior colleges became community colleges (Pattison, 1999). Simultaneously, as these veterans returned home with GI Bill benefits, the U.S. military was also on the forefront of exploring non-traditional education delivery methods, introducing over 200 correspondence courses through the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI). This program provided the foundation for the partnership that continues today between the military and American colleges and universities delivering millions of courses over the years through distance education (McMurray, 2007).

As technology rapidly changed, so too did the delivery of adult education (Cahoon, 1998). In contrast to traditional correspondence or drill and practice computer courses, the 1990s saw a proliferation of computer-based training through CD-ROM or web downloads, which expanded to internet-based e-learning in the late 1990s (Kidd, 2010). E-learning, defined as

learning covering a wide set of applications and processes which include computer and web-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaborations (Urdan & Weggen, 2000), forms the foundation for much of the distance learning that occurs in higher education. The definition for distance education that has gained wide acceptance was defined by Schlosser and Simonson (2009) as “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors.”

As recent improvements in technology have allowed for increased efficiency and capability, distance education has grown at higher education institutions at an expansive rate. Online learning now offers learners the ability for greater accessibility to both real-time and asynchronous interactions with other students and instructors. In Fall 2010, 31.3% of total enrollment at four-year degree granting institutions occurred through online courses and has risen consistently since Fall 2002 when it was 9.6% (Allen & Seaman, 2011).

Non-traditional college students have flocked to distance education to meet educational needs. Simonson (2012) states “distance education has become the most significant change to the process of teaching and learning within the past decade.” The focus of online learning often involves increasing availability for students without access to traditional, face-to-face course offerings; increasing the cost effectiveness of creating, assembling, and dispersing instructional content; or increasing the number of students instructors can oversee while maintaining comparable learning outcomes to traditional instruction. Recent applications of online learning are combining multiple forms of synchronous (e.g., webcasting, chat rooms, desktop audio/video technology) and asynchronous (e.g., email, threaded discussion boards, newsgroups) online interactions and technology applications (Means et al., 2009).

Distance alumni fundraising. While colleges and universities have been quick to expand distance education offerings, little planning has been done on a large scale to contemplate the consequences of new distance online degree programs. In Fall 2010, while 65.5% of chief academic officers felt that online education was critical to the long term strategy for their institution, less than 50% included online programs in their campus strategic plan (Allen & Seaman, 2011). In addition, the same study found that faculty value of online learning, which indicates a faculty's acceptance of the value and legitimacy of online education, had only increased from 27.6% in Fall 2002 to 32.0% in Fall 2010.

As distance education continues to face academic hurdles, it is not surprising there is little existing research expanding into the area of non-traditional distance students as alumni. Despite representing the largest percentage increase in student enrollment (US Department of Education, 2011), non-traditional students continue to be understudied as a population (McCain, 2002). However, within the advancement community this has begun to shift, particularly through the higher education advancement discussion calling for more research into distance students and alumni that has taken place over the past few years. Pulley (2008) spoke with advancement professionals who highlighted a lack of research in the area, and questioned if traditional fundraising models would be appropriate with online alumni. Allen and Voos (2009) issued a call to action, urging schools to undertake research to understand and engage online students, so that institutions are prepared to integrate them into the active alumni community.

In 2002, Lesht and Schejbal began to review preliminary data and ask questions about the future of fund raising from distance students. Recently, several studies have built on these initial questions and assumptions (Hurst, 2008; Johnson, 2013; Miller, 2013; Moore, 2014; Whitby, 2014). Several of these studies examined non-traditional students and alumni. In the first

research to look into this, Hurst (2008) explored the differences in giving history and motivations between traditional and non-traditional alumni at a public university in the Southwest. No significant differences were found in giving frequency, amounts, level of affiliation, or participation as alumni. However, there were significant differences for initiatives aimed at on-campus projects in the populations' motivations for giving, including a lower level of interest in giving by non-traditional alumni who took most of their classes off campus.

In a study of evening and satellite campus non-traditional students, traditional alumni were shown to give financially to the institution at much higher levels (79%) than non-traditional alumni (21%), while the institution currently had a much larger population of non-traditional students (61%) than traditional students (31%). Campus environment and sense of belonging were both found to be significantly related to the intent to give as alumni (Miller, 2013). The researcher was employed as director at one of the satellite campus locations, and in contrast to the other locations, Miller had previously made changes to encourage and foster a sense of belonging among students. These changes included providing a break room; extending computer lab hours; designing and implementing the vibrant colors of the university; engaging adjunct faculty at the location; creating a Facebook page for the satellite campus engaging students with events, contests, and an online scavenger hunt; increasing recreational and volunteer opportunities; and organizing trips to the main college campus for sports events. Miller posited that the supportive campus environment contributed to the non-traditional students at this campus developing a greater sense of belonging, as evidenced by higher mean scores of sense of belonging and intent to give similar to the traditional main campus students.

Johnson (2013) examined differences in 27 attributes including self-reported giving, student involvement, and alumni engagement between non-traditional, defined as age 25 and

above at graduation, and traditional alumni from data collected by the Alumni Attitude Survey over five years across 101 colleges and universities across the United States. The research revealed that traditional undergraduate alumni had the highest inclination to give, but that both traditional and non-traditional female alumni were most likely to make frequent gifts. In contrast to previous research, participating in career and professional organizations and community service were the only two student involvements that had significant association with alumni giving. With regards to alumni involvement, identifying job opportunities for new alumni was the factor most positively associated with giving for both traditional and non-traditional alumni. Both traditional and non-traditional alumni were most likely to give to the institution's athletic programs.

Additionally, recent research (Whitby, 2014) investigated whether non-traditional, online students differed from traditional, face-to-face students with regards to their intentions related to post graduation engagement with the institution. The results from this study refute the assumptions previously made by many in both fundraising and online education that distance students are less likely to be interested as both students and alumni.

Morrison (2013) suspects that initial skepticism within the advancement community regarding distance students' levels of affinity has been misplaced due to online programs attracting intensely committed alumni who are enthusiastic about lifelong learning and their social and educational development. In a 2012 survey of online alumni at the University of Liverpool, 74% of alumni stated the degree had directly benefited their careers. The institution had an expansive organization of alumni chapters, including international ones, which they had sought to integrate online alumni into. Since online alumni are accustomed to engaging in a virtual environment, they have also been active on the university's social media groups and

online forums. In the 2012 survey, Morrison found that online alumni expressed a significantly higher interest than previous campus-based alumni results from a survey in 2011. Of online alumni, 49% were interested in becoming an alumni ambassador, which involves delivering recruiting event sessions; 47% were interested in becoming a mentor for current students; and 49% expressed interest in participating in a focus group. Of the 11 engagement opportunities offered, 70% of online alumni were interested in staying involved with the institution in at least one area. The university has had mixed results with financial giving from online alumni. Highly engaged online alumni from giving cultures have been responsive to solicitations, but annual giving rates have been less successful than the rates from campus-based alumni. Initial feedback, in congruence with the findings of Hurst (2008), indicates that online alumni are reluctant to donate to funds that specifically support on-campus initiatives (Morrison, 2013).

Using qualitative methodology utilizing interviews, Moore (2014) explored the factors that influence online master's degree students' potential alumni giving at John Hopkins University. The results revealed six important factors that influence this population, including student satisfaction, sense of belonging, intrinsic motivation/pro social behavior, institutional prestige, teaching presence, and social presence. The results indicated that similar factors apply to both distance students' propensities to give as those previously documented by the literature regarding traditional students; however, teaching presence and social presence were found to be uniquely important to the online environment of distance students. Even for students without strong institutional identity, the environment and learning opportunities fostered by instructors online created opportunities for departmental identity (Moore, 2014).

Related distance student research. While there is little research into the giving behaviors and motivations of online alumni, there is a field of existing research into factors such

as engagement, satisfaction, a sense of community, and quality that shape the distance student experience. These factors also directly relate to research previously detailed that has been shown to influence alumni giving in traditional students.

Student engagement. Translating the recommendations of traditional research on student engagement into the online environment has not been without challenges. In the online student literature, the research focus appears to be engagement with the course technology and instruction at a very granular level, rather than holistic student engagement which is often the focus in a traditional campus setting. This may be because many on-campus student engagement opportunities offered by an institution's student affairs division do not adapt easily to online students. Traditional students have the opportunity and benefit of campus experiences that both deepen academic learning and encourage personal development, however online learners, often part time and non-traditional, are limited by both geography and time allowances from these on-campus involvements (Fontaine & Cook, 2014).

In a study by Graham and Gisi (2000), the authors examined engagement of non-traditional learners, and the results showed that the greater the engagement within courses and also among other activities such as college organizations, the greater the reported learning outcomes. However, research also found that for non-traditional students, balancing work and family obligations left little time to explore campus involvement opportunities (Graham & Gisi, 2000; Tucker, 2003). Fontaine and Cook (2014) suggest institutions must consider transforming engagement opportunities for online learners rather than trying to encourage them to participate in traditional extracurricular experiences. Recommendations to increase online student engagement include participating in high-impact activities that go beyond online courses (Kuh, 2008), such as service learning (McKeown, 2012). With technology increasingly permeating

throughout society, and social interactions in general becoming less constrained by geography, McKeown (2012) proposes the possibility of effectively translating extracurricular activities, such as a school newspaper, chess club, or reading group, to the online environment. She also discusses the potential for local or regional meetings for activities for distance students.

Institutions have begun offering virtual student government, webcast sports events, online honor societies, and even Greek organizations for distance students (McKeown, 2012; Meyer, 2014).

Dare, Zapata, and Thomas (2005) found that distance students placed the most value on student services and administrative services that are critical to their success, such as registration and records, advising, and the libraries, and were much less interested in utilizing services geared toward a traditional, on-campus student, such as the student center, on-campus organizations, housing, and dining. In contrast to the prevailing view of distance students as desiring only minimal transactional student services, the results also indicated that distance learners report they would utilize a number of services and programs that were not available currently at the institution. Over 30 percent of distance learners reported that if the following services were available, they would likely or very likely use them: the counseling center, fitness or wellness facilities, gymnasium, online leadership development series, student health services, and virtual orientation (Dare et al., 2005). Jackson (2006) interviewed several administrators in advancement and alumni areas and found they had success engaging non-traditional students in career programming and special homecoming events, engaging them as students to build affinity as alumni. After graduation, one institution invited alumni who were past non-traditional scholarship recipients to attend the scholarship banquet for non-traditional students receiving the scholarships currently. Meyer (2014) cautions institutions considering online student engagement services such as virtual student government or webcasts of sports and graduation

events, that due to the research focus on engagement within online courses and not in student services, additional research is needed to understand the impact of these services on online students with regards to elements such as learning, retention, and satisfaction.

Social presence and community. With traditional alumni, many elements of the community experience built during their time on campus contribute to increased organizational identification and financial contributions. A major difficulty in establishing the concept of community online is that in envisioning a community, a natural assumption is to think of people interacting face-to-face (Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, & Shoemaker, 2000). While distance students do not directly share traditional on-campus experiences, developing community in an online setting has been an important focus for many researchers since the early days of online education (Meyer, 2014). Palloff and Pratt (1999), laying the groundwork for future research in this area, indicated the following as activities that reveal an online learning community is forming: active interaction with both course content and personal communications, comments among students, rather than between student and instructor, agreement or questioning evidencing socially constructed meaning, and encouragement and support expressions shared among students.

Research focusing on the development of community has shown that a sense of community can be created in a distance learning environment (Rovai, 2002; Thompson & MacDonald, 2005) and that it provides benefits to both the learners and the program (Haythornthwaite et al., 2000). Creating community in an online environment provides a safe atmosphere of trust and respect, encouragement of intellectual exchange, and a place where like-minded individuals can come together to share a journey of activities, purpose, and goals

(Conrad, 2005). Wachter, Gupta, and Quaddus (2000) describe four characteristics that are indicators of successful virtual communities in education:

1. Successful communities help learners understand which resources and services they are likely to find within and to determine what kinds of information and resources are necessary to serve their needs.
2. Successful communities integrate content with the capability of communications, whereby learners can hold discussions among themselves to clarify content, to exchange ideas, and to ensure credibility.
3. In successful communities, learner-generated content is appreciated and is actively solicited. Learners can aggregate and compare their experiences independently of instructors.
4. Successful virtual communities act as organizing agents on behalf of their learners. They seek to increase the quality of information, products, or services which are provided to them through it. (p. 477)

The term “community” in online education is sometimes used synonymously with community of inquiry, learning community, or community of practice, and research in community building often overlaps with that of the community of inquiry (CoI) framework (Conrad, 2005). Although online community building shares concepts such as active interaction and socially constructed meaning with the CoI model, CoI is focused on the entire educational experience and student learning, and the CoI instrument incorporates more elements than just creating community (Meyer, 2014). The Community of Inquiry framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) is a process model of learning that was adapted and applied to online learning through three components essential to a successful online higher educational experience: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Ling, 2007). Research indicates that the three CoI presences have positive effects on student satisfaction (Rubin, Fernandes, & Avgerinou, 2013). Social presence, the degree to which learners in online course environments feel affectively connected to one another (Garrison et al., 1999), contributes to learners speaking freely and comfortably in a discussion as well as revealing their personality

to others (Meyer, 2014). Of the three presences in the CoI framework, social presence is the longest researched (Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 2009). It has been shown to relate positively to student satisfaction (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Finch, 2006; Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2003; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Rovai, 2002), learning outcomes (Arbaugh, 2005), and contributing to a sense of community (Aragon, 2003). Within an online course, social presence can be encouraged and enabled in several ways: 1) through thoughtful course design; 2) through the instructor's interactions with students; and 3) by student participation with one another in the class (Aragon, 2003).

Satisfaction. Satisfaction is an element that has been researched with regards to distance students as the proliferation of online courses and programs prompted questions related to a course's quality and the satisfaction among students with the academic experience. Research has explored both the learning outcomes and satisfaction with experiences of online students, with a number of studies finding that the quality of learning and overall student experience between online and in person programs are equivalent (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). A meta-analysis of online learning research studies found that students who completed all or some of their courses online performed modestly better than those who took the same course through face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2009). Research indicates that satisfaction among online students has also been found to exceed that of students in face-to-face classroom settings (Arbaugh, 2000).

Ehlers, Goertz, Hildebrandt, and Pawlowski (2004) identified five factors that influence overall student satisfaction with online learning experiences: 1) satisfaction with discussions and interactions with both peers and instructors; 2) actual learning experiences that match student learning expectations; 3) student services, including advising, registration, and access to materials, being at least as satisfactory as on campus options; 4) satisfaction with how to learn

online; and 5) online learning outcomes that prepare students for career, professional, and academic development.

Quality of the online experience. The quality of the student experience through both coursework and interactions with instructors, has been shown in traditional students to impact satisfaction and alumni giving. While little research has been conducted with regard to online student engagement outside of coursework, data suggests that the online environment promotes as much or more academic engagement compared with a traditional face-to-face classroom (McKeown, 2012).

Overall, results from Bernard, Brauer, Abrami, and Surkes (2004) and previous reviews of the distance education literature (Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Moore, 2014) indicate no significant differences in effectiveness between distance education and face-to-face education. Using data from the NSSE, examining a variety of modes for course delivery, Chen, Lambert, and Guidry (2010) suggested that a positive correlation was found between technology use and measures of engagement and learning outcomes. Satisfaction (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Finch, 2006; Shin & Chan, 2004; Swan, 2001), social presence (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Finch, 2006), sense of community (Conrad, 2002; Robinson, 2011) and retention rates (Shin & Chan, 2004) have been shown to be affected positively by increased engagement in online course activities. The CoI framework addresses the impact of the role of the instructor through the element of teaching presence, which includes designing, facilitating, supporting, and enhancing social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes (Garrison et al., 1999).

CHAPTER III:

METHODS

Research Design

Alumni of distance education programs present enormous potential to institutions as a revenue source. With the numbers of alumni of distance programs increasing, overlooking the possibility of these alumni as donors may cause institutions to miss opportunities for valuable funds. As this population grows, additional research is needed to understand this population's experience as alumni. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between distance alumni and the institution can assist fundraisers and administrators with development plans and strategic direction.

The focus of this study was to investigate how alumni of distance programs at a flagship southeastern university behave with regards to organizational identity and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the relationship of organizational identity to supportive behaviors including financial giving and promoting the institution. The study also examined the role of the elements of perceived institutional prestige and satisfaction as they relate to their influence on distance alumni's organizational identification. Additionally, the study explored the potential effect of demographic and academic factors on the organizational identity of distance alumni. In addition to the academic research contributions of this study, the results provide discernible recommendations to fundraisers and university administrators who seek to better understand the identity of distance alumni and potential ways to increase financial giving and involvement among this donor base.

For the purposes of this study, a quantitative approach was implemented using both survey data and historical data from the institution in order to determine the relationship between several variables. Survey research is a division of quantitative research that provides a statistical analysis of trends, behaviors, or opinions with the aim of drawing generalizations from a sample to a population (Creswell, 2014). The advantages of a self-reporting electronic survey design are that it allows for all distance learning alumni to be contacted at once, is less resource-intensive than individual interviews, and allows for expedited turnaround in data collection (Creswell, 2014). Disadvantages of the survey design are low response rates due to voluntary participation, and the possibility of incomplete survey responses due to lack of time, interest, or technical malfunction (Colorado State University, 2014). This study also used a non-experimental research design. Utilizing existing data on alumni demographics, degree information, and financial giving enabled this study to determine if differences among alumni organizational identification and supportive behaviors may be affected by these variables. This design took advantage of existing data, was non-invasive to the participants, and was less costly and time consuming than an experimental design (Airasian & Gay, n.d.). However, when contrasted to an experimental design, non-experimental design is limited in its ability to truly find cause and effect relationships (Creswell, 2014).

The research questions that guided this study included the following:

1. What is the relationship between organizational identification and supportive behaviors, including financial donations and promotion of the institution, by distance alumni?
2. Is there a difference in organizational identity between distance alumni who are donors and those who are non-donors?

3. What is the relationship between degree of organizational identity and donor/non-donor status of distance alumni?
4. What are the effects of organizational prestige and satisfaction on organizational identification among distance alumni?
5. What is the relationship between demographic variables and organizational identification of distance alumni?

Setting

The setting for this study was a flagship state institution in the Southeast United States. The institution offers undergraduate and graduate degrees. The distance learning designation is applied to a student at the time of application into select programs designated as distance learning degree programs, and is used throughout the student life cycle to identify the student as one who is primarily taking online or blended coursework rather than a traditional, on-campus student. Institutional review board approval for this study is documented in Appendix B.

Sample

Participants for this study were 2009 - 2014 distance degree alumni with a current email address in the system maintained by the institution's office of Advancement. Alumni of graduate and undergraduate programs were selected specifically with regards to the institution's ability to accurately track distance program alumni, to view a five-year slice of alumni, and to also allow all alumni at least one year for postgraduate supportive behaviors towards the institution. Before the selected time frame, alumni from distance programs were not accurately tracked from an academic or fund raising perspective at this institution.

Based on graduation records, 4,152 distance education students (1,172 undergraduate and 2,980 graduate degrees) graduated in the years 2009 through 2014. As such, the survey sample

was restricted to those alumni who had a current email on file with the institution, or 4,136 individuals. The restricted population was not intended as the greater target population but rather the operationalized population used for the purposes of surveying. As the survey population was restricted to alumni with active email addresses in the system, there was an issue of under coverage, as eligible members of the target population were excluded if they failed to update email information with the university. Alumni receive a university issued email address as students which is active for at least five years, and also may have a personal address on file with the school. 1,868 of the 4,136 primary email addresses were institutionally issued, and may not still be in use. The survey was sent first to the email address denoted as primary in the institution's system, and then to the alternate email for alumni who did not respond to the first survey email.

Data Collection

There were two forms of data collection for this study. A survey was administered to assess the elements of organizational identification, satisfaction, perceived institutional prestige, and promotion. The data from this survey was collected through a web based application of the instrument collected through Qualtrics. Qualtrics was utilized due to its availability as the institution's primary surveying software and its compatibility with statistical analysis programs. The participants were sent an email with instructions and a link directing them to an online location to complete the survey. The survey was open for two weeks, and on a selected date a reminder email was sent to the participants who had not yet responded. In a response rate typical to online surveys, 530 participants responded to the survey.

In addition, the Millennium system, which houses the institution's alumni and giving data, was used to collect related advancement data. Millennium number, a unique identifier

assigned each alumni in the Millennium system, was used to match survey responses to institutional data. In addition, participant email, zip code, age, academic degree information, and financial giving data were retrieved from this system. The participant email was used to send the survey. Zip code was used to approximate the participant’s distance from the institution.

Alumni who have made gifts who wish to remain anonymous were excluded from this study.

These donors total less than 1% of the yearly gifts and did not impact the accuracy of the study.

Financial giving data includes the total amount of all gifts to the institution, total amount of gifts to athletics, and number of gifts given. An example of this data is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Institutional Data

Zip Code	Age	Email (Primary)	Email (Other)	Total Giving	Athletics Giving	Campus	Major(s)	Degree Year(s)	College(s)	DL Degree Year(s)
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Instrumentation

The study gathered data through use of a survey instrument (appendix A) and also through data housed within the Office of Advancement. The survey instrument was created by the researcher using existing instruments to measure the independent variables of organizational identification, perceived prestige, satisfaction, and the dependent variable of promotion.

Existing institutional financial giving data provided by the office of Advancement at the school in question was used to measure the variables of total amount donated and athletics donations.

Additionally, the variables of age, distance from the institution, level, college, major, distance degree (y/n) for all degrees received, were provided by data from the Office of Advancement.

Age at graduation was calculated by the researcher based on the participant’s current age, which was provided by the institution, and the year of the participant’s first distance degree. Distance

from the institution was calculated by the researcher from zip code information of the participant and the institution.

Organizational identification. Organizational identification is characterized as the degree to which an individual defines their self in terms of an organization, thus molding the self-concept. This study used the identification scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). The identification scale has shown to be both easily adaptable and reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha score of .87. While the scale was originally constructed for an all-male religious institution, its applicability for other groups has been demonstrated, and it is highly regarded as the best option to measure identification (Ricketta, 2005). A number of previous studies with traditional alumni (Arnett et al., 2003; Koenig-Lewis et al., 2015; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013) used an organization identification measure developed from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) scale. It has also been utilized in research with populations which may relate to distance alumni including art museum members (Bhattacharya et al., 1995), and virtual employees (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

Perceived institutional prestige. Perceived institutional prestige refers to an individual's beliefs about the perception of the institution held by others. In the traditional alumni literature, perceived prestige has affected the supportive behaviors of donating and promoting (Arnett et al., 2003; Hanson, 2000; Holmes, 2009; McDearmon, 2010; Porter et al., 2011; Sung & Yang, 2009). Moore (2014) found that prestige is a factor that influenced potential alumni giving among distance graduate students. However, the literature has failed to examine the element of prestige with both an undergraduate and graduate distance alumni population and in relation to organizational identification. This study used a prestige scale which Arnett et al. (2003) adapted from Mael and Ashforth (1992). Mael and Ashforth's (1992) original scale had a Cronbach's

alpha score of .77. Previous studies (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Hanson, 2000; Porter et al., 2011) also used an organizational prestige measure developed from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) scale, with standardized factor loading for each question of .81, .87, and .77 respectively. These studies also tested and found that the instrument had convergent and discriminant validity. Arnett et al.'s (2003) scale removed the question "People seeking to advance their careers should downplay their association with the institution" due to crossloading with other constructs, and as such, it was not included in this study. Arnett et al.'s (2003) scale's standardized loading scores were .73, .82, and .74 for each question respectively, with .81 coefficient alpha reliability and .59 estimate of variance extracted.

Satisfaction. Satisfaction refers to the fulfillment or confirmation of one's expectations. Previous research in organizational identification of traditional students substantiated the concept of categories of satisfaction (Stephenson & Yerger, 2015). Additionally, research has identified elements of satisfaction in distance learning environments (Ehlers et al., 2004). The five item scale used in Wilkins et al. (2015) and based on work of Wilkins, Stephens Balakrishnan & Huisman (2012) was adapted slightly to rate satisfaction. The previous studies using this instrument examined the satisfaction of students currently pursuing degree programs. Tentative language such as "so far" was removed to be appropriate to an alumni audience who have completed their degrees. Wilkins et al.'s (2012) instrument had a Cronbach's alpha of .89, indicating strong internal reliability.

Promotion. Promotion is defined as the act of supporting and publicizing the organization. Results have been mixed with regards to the relationship between organizational identification and promotion in traditional alumni. While Porter et al. (2011) and Stephenson (2013) found that identification positively influenced both promotion and financial contributions,

Hanson (2000) found only minimal correlation between the supportive behaviors of financial giving and promoting the university. The study used a promotion scale developed by Arnett et al. (2003), constructed as part of a number of elements in an instrument to measure alumni organizational identity salience. The scale contains three questions and originally had a seven-point scale. The alpha for each question is .87, .86, and .87 respectively, with reliability of .90 and estimated variance extracted of .75.

Scoring. The instruments selected all used a scale for participants to respond gauging their agreement with each question, however, there were differentiations in the number of points on the scale for each instrument. Mael and Ashforth's organizational identification instrument (1992) measured using a five-point scale, while Wilkin's satisfaction instrument (2015) and Arnett, German, and Hunt's (2003) promotion and adapted prestige instrument used a seven-point scale. In consistence with the original organizational identification instrument and for ease of use for the participants, the researcher elected to use a five-point scale for all questions.

Data Analysis

Upon survey completion, the data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS predictive analytics statistical package version 23. As data analysis is one of the most critical components of quantitative research, using a software package such as SPSS produced accurate and precise findings. SPSS is designed to produce various statistical analyses, tables, and charts, that are useful in clarifying the results from the surveys in a meaningful and concise method.

To answer the first research question, correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between organizational identification and the supportive behaviors of financial donations and promoting the institution. The second research question used a Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether there was a difference in overall organizational identification between

donors and non-donors. To answer the third research question, logistic regression was utilized to predict the effects of organizational identity on donor status. In answering the fourth research question a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which prestige and satisfaction were related to organizational identification. In the fifth research question, the demographic variables of age, major and college, academic level, distance from the institution, and multiple degrees were analyzed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in organizational identity based on demographic variables. Table 2 presents the data analysis plan for this study.

Table 2

Data Analysis

Research Question	Test	Dependent Variable(s)	Independent Variable(s)
One	Spearman Correlation	Organizational Identity	Financial Giving, Promotion
Two	Mann-Whitney U Test	Organizational Identity	Donor, Non Donor
Three	Logistic Regression	Donor, Non Donor	Organizational Identity
Four	Multiple Linear Regression	Organizational Identity	Prestige, Satisfaction
Five	Kruskal–Wallis, Mann-Whitney U Test	Organizational Identity	Demographic Variables

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how undergraduate and graduate alumni of distance programs at a flagship university behave with regards to organizational identity and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the role of the elements of perceived organizational prestige and satisfaction in organizational identity with the population of distance alumni. Also, the study explored potential differences related to the additional demographic and academic factors in relation to their impact on organizational identity. This chapter presents the results of the study. A descriptive analysis of the sample of participants is presented, followed by the findings for each research question. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does organizational identification impact the supportive behaviors, including financial donations and promotion, of distance alumni?
2. Is there a difference in perceived organizational identity between distance alumni who are donors and those who are non-donors?
3. What is the relationship between degree of organizational identity and donor/ non-donor status of distance alumni?
4. What are the effects of organizational prestige and satisfaction on organizational identification among distance alumni?
5. What is the relationship between organizational identification and demographic variables of distance alumni?

Demographics

The sample consisted of 530 distance degree graduates. Data relating to age, distance from the institution, degree and college information, and financial giving to the institution were obtained from the institutional data and matched to each participant. This data is presented in table 3.

Table 3

Demographics

	N	% of Total
<u>Age at graduation</u>		
20 - 29	121	22.8%
30 - 39	187	35.3%
40 - 49	130	24.5%
50 - 59	80	15.1%
60+	12	2.3%
<u>Miles from institution</u>		
< 50	59	11.1%
50 - 99	97	18.3%
100 - 249	170	32.1%
250 - 499	58	10.9%
> 500	146	27.5%
<u>College</u>		
Arts and Sciences	33	6.2%
Commerce and Business	46	8.7%
Communications	45	8.5%
Education	66	12.5%
Engineering	1	2.0%
Human Environmental Scien	152	28.7%
Law	24	4.5%
Nursing	131	24.7%
Social Work	32	6.0%
<u>Level</u>		
Undergraduate	147	27.7%
Graduate	383	72.3%
<u>Multiple degrees</u>		
Yes	107	20.2%
No	423	79.8%
<u>Donor status</u>		
Donor	283	53.4%
Non-donor	247	46.6%

Age. The current age of each participant was supplied and the researcher used this to calculate the approximate age of the participant when they received their first distance degree, which is referred to as age at graduation. The sample indicated that 22.8% of participants were age 20 - 29 ($n=121$), 35.3% ($n=187$) were age 30 – 39, 24.5% ($n=130$) were age 40 – 49, 15.1% ($n=80$) were age 50 – 59, and 2.3% ($n=12$) were age 60 and older when they graduated with their first distance degree from the institution.

Distance from the institution. In determining distance from the institution, the researcher calculated the distance between each participant's current zip code and the central zip code of the institution. The distances were then organized into brackets based on natural break points in feasibility for traveling to the campus physically. Under 50 miles was selected as the first break point as a distance in which one could attend campus daily. The second break point, 50 – 99 miles, was selected as a distance which could be commuted regularly by driving. The third break point, 100 – 249 miles was determined to be a distance where a student would be able to travel to campus on a monthly basis. The fourth break point, 250 – 499 miles, could be driven once or twice a semester. The final breakpoint, 500 miles or more, was determined to be an unfeasible distance to travel to campus for any reason on a regular basis. The sample indicated that 11.1% lived less than 50 miles ($n=59$), 18.3% lived 50 – 99 miles ($n=97$), 32.1% lived 100 – 249 miles ($n=170$), 10.9% lived 250 – 499 miles ($n=58$), and 27.5% lived 500 miles ($n=146$) and greater away from the institution.

Academic information. Academic information of major, college, and level of the first distance degree was collected. Due to lower graduation and participation numbers from some majors, the academic ranking category had to be grouped by college rather than major. The 530 study participants represented nine colleges and schools at the locus of interest. The College of

Arts and Sciences represented 6.2% of participants ($n=33$); College of Commerce and Business represented 8.7% ($n=46$); College of Communications and Information Sciences represented 8.5% ($n=45$); College of Education represented 12.5% ($n=66$); College of Engineering represented 0.2% ($n=1$); College of Human Environmental Sciences represented 28.7% ($n=152$); School of Law represented 4.5% ($n=24$); College of Nursing represented 24.7% ($n=131$); and School of Social Work represented 6.0% ($n=32$).

The institution in the study offered a number of degree types to distance learning students. The academic levels used to group were undergraduate, which included all undergraduate level degrees, and graduate, which included masters, education specialist, doctoral, and law degrees. 27.7% ($n=147$) of participants completed their first distance degree at the institution as an undergraduate while 72.3% ($n=383$) of participants completed their first distance degree at the institution as a graduate student.

The number of alumni who hold multiple degrees was also examined. 20.2% ($n=107$) of participants hold multiple degrees from the institution, with 2.8% ($n=15$) holding multiple distance degrees. Additionally, 68.2% ($n=73$) of multiple degree holders' first degrees were from a traditional, on-campus degree program.

Financial Giving

Each participant's total financial giving to the institution was provided to the researcher by the institution. Because the participants graduated over a span of five years (2009 – 2014), there was opportunity for participants of earlier graduation years to have more time to make financial gifts as alumni. To calculate a standard number irrespective of graduation year, titled average yearly financial giving, the total financial giving was divided by the number of years passed since the graduation year of the alumni's first distance degree.

Additionally, the institution provided the date of the participant's first financial gift. The researcher used this information to determine if participants had made gifts before being affiliated with a distance program. 16 participants with previous degrees from the institution made gifts before becoming distance students, while 12 participants with no obvious affiliation with the institution made gifts before becoming distance students. Upon investigation, these gifts from graduates without prior degrees were either a joint gift with a spouse, or a gift to the student alumni program, which inferred that the graduate was at an earlier time enrolled as a traditional student but did not complete their degree. Based upon the small number of participants with previous giving, the researcher concluded that the formula for average yearly giving was the most accurate metric to assess the giving amounts of graduates.

Since the institution was a NCAA Division I school with a large athletics program, the researcher also received the subset of participants' giving that was specifically to the athletics department. 24 participants had athletic giving, with a mean of \$4,777.96 and standard deviation of \$9,208.80. Two participants with large athletic giving totals (\$40,800.00 and \$23,670.00, respectively) contributed to these results.

Donor status was determined by whether the participant had any financial giving to the institution. The study data contained 283 (53.4%) donors and 247 (46.6%) non-donors. The mean average yearly giving was \$80.23, the overall mode was \$0.00, and the standard deviation was \$522.56. The large standard deviation is due to a few large donors, and 46.6% ($n=247$) of participants being non-donors as additionally evidenced by the mode of \$0.00.

Survey Data

Using a five-point Likert scale, participants were asked to select a value to survey questions 1 – 6 assessing organizational identification (identity subscale), 7-10 assessing

perceived organizational prestige (prestige subscale), 11-13 assessing promotion (promotion subscale), and 14-19 assessing satisfaction (satisfaction subscale). The Likert scale ranges consisted of strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), somewhat agree (4), and strongly agree (5). A mean value for each subscale in the survey was calculated for each participant, with the overall descriptive statistics for each subscale detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Survey Scale Descriptives

	N	M	SD	Std. Error	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Identity	530	3.834	0.935	0.041	0.875	1.00	5.00
Prestige	530	4.443	0.667	0.029	0.446	1.00	5.00
Promotion	530	4.290	0.917	0.040	0.841	1.00	5.00
Satisfaction	530	4.606	0.724	0.031	0.524	1.00	5.00

Research Question 1

The first research question was “How does organizational identification impact the supportive behaviors, including financial donations and promotion, of distance alumni?” This question explored whether higher organizational identification contributes to increased financial giving and increased promotion of the institution to friends and family. Organizational identification and promotion were obtained through survey data while financial donations were mapped to each participant using institutional data. To answer this question, correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between organizational identification and the supportive behaviors of financial donations and promoting the institution.

Results

The data failed assumptions of skewness and normal distribution, with high ratings for organizational identification. Therefore, the nonparametric statistic test of Spearman's rank

correlation coefficient, which measures the strength of relationship between two variables, was used. Table 5 reports the results of the correlation analysis of research question 1. The correlation between organizational identification (Identity subscale) and promoting the institution (Promotion subscale) was found to be statistically significant, $r(530) = +.680$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. This strong positive correlation suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are much more likely to make statements promoting the institution to others. The correlation between organizational identification and average yearly giving was found to be statistically significant, $r(530) = +.393$, $p < .01$, two-tailed. This positive correlation suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are more likely to make financial gifts to the institution.

Table 5

Correlation Analysis

		Promotion	Financial Giving
	Spearman Correlation	.680	.393
Organizational Identification	Significance(2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	530	530

Research Question 2

The second research question was “Is there a difference in organizational identity between distance alumni who are donors and those who are non-donors?” This question explored whether there was a difference in overall organizational identification between donors and non-donors. The organizational identification subscale mean was 3.83, the overall mode was 4.67, and the standard deviation was .94, with details for each question being previously detailed

in Table 4. Donor status was determined by whether the participant had any financial giving to the institution. The study data contained 283 (53.4%) donors and 247 (46.6%) non-donors.

Results

Table 6 shows that higher organizational identity was reported in donors compared with non-donors. Because the assumption of normal distribution was violated by skewed data due to high ratings for organizational identification, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used in place of the independent samples t-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the organizational identification of donors and non-donors. Results of that analysis indicated that there was a significant difference, $z = -9.174$, $p < .001$, with donors reporting a higher organizational identity than non-donors. The effect size was moderate ($r = -.39$), indicating a nearly two fifths difference in standard deviation units observed between the two groups.

Table 6

Organizational Identity by Donor Status Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Donor	283	4.193	0.668	0.040	4.333	1.67	5.00
Non-Donor	247	3.421	1.024	0.065	3.500	1.00	5.00

Research Question 3

The third research question was “What is the relationship between degree of organizational identity and donor/non-donor status of distance alumni?” The organizational identification descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. Donor status was determined by whether the participant had any financial giving to the institution. The study data contained 283 (53.4%) donors and 247 (46.6%) non-donors. Descriptive statistics for organizational identity by

donor status are detailed in Table 6. To answer this question, logistic regression was utilized to predict the effects of organizational identity on donor status.

This question sought to identify the impact of organizational identity on making financial donations to the institution. Before conducting the logistic regression analysis for this study, a multiple linear regression was conducted with the logit transformation of the independent variable. This regression was not significant ($p = .578$) and thus the linearity of the logit assumption was met for organizational identity. Logistic regression was then used to predict how the continuous independent variable of organizational identity affected the dichotomous outcome variable of donor status.

Results

A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that organizational identity reliably distinguished between donors and non-donors, $X^2(1, N=530) = 98.371, p < .001$. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness of Fit Test showed the model was a good fit with $X^2(8, N=530) = 4.442, p = 8.15$. Nagelkerke's R^2 of .226 indicated a moderate relationship between organizational identity and donating. Prediction success overall was 67.9% (78.1% for donors and 56.3% for non-donors). The Wald criterion demonstrated that organizational identity made a significant contribution to prediction ($p < .01$). Exp(B) value indicates that when organizational identification is raised by one unit the odds ratio is 2.910 times as large and therefore the participant is nearly three times more likely to be a donor.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was "What are the effects of organizational prestige and satisfaction on organizational identification among distance alumni?" Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. To answer this question, a multiple linear regression analysis was

conducted to determine the extent to which prestige and satisfaction (independent variables) were related to organizational identification (dependent variable).

In order to use multiple linear regression to make inferences back to the population, the following assumptions require that 1) the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is linear; 2) the independent variables are fixed and without error; 3) the residuals must be normally distributed, independent, and the variances of the residuals are constant at each setting of the independent variables. The assumption of normality was tested via the Shapiro Wilkes test. Organizational identification ($SW=.927$, $df = 10$, $p<.01$) violated this assumption due to the skewness related to a large number of high ratings. While this assumption was violated, the large sample size allows for continued use of multiple linear regression with this data set. Regression diagnostics were conducted to determine if the data contained any points that were outliers or influential. The Studentized Residual (SRESID) observations were used to evaluate outliers. The results indicated that there were seven observations that were outliers and influential above ± 3 SD. Upon investigation, the researcher believed these responses to be possibly purposefully incorrectly entered, most likely for entry to win the prize associated with completing the survey, and were deleted since they were not believed to be a true representation of the participants' assessment.

Results

The multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the relationship between organizational identity and both independent variables, organizational prestige and satisfaction. Both of the variables explained a statistically significant variation in organizational identification, $F(2, 520)=145.511$, $p<.001$, with an adjusted R^2 of .356. Approximately 36% of

the variance in organizational identity can be explained by perceived organizational prestige and satisfaction. The results of these analyses are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

ANOVA Table for Regression Model

	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	151.084	2	75.542	145.511	.000
Residual	269.958	520	0.519		
Total	421.042	522			

Next, each independent variable was examined. The results, displayed in Table 8, showed that perceived organizational prestige, controlling for satisfaction, was a significant predictor of organizational identification ($t(520) = 9.813, p < .001$). Organizational identification increased by .546 points for every 1-point increase in organizational prestige. The results also showed that satisfaction, controlling for institutional prestige, was a significant predictor of organizational identification ($t(520) = 6.586, p < .001$). Organizational identification increased by .338 points for every 1-point increase in satisfaction.

Table 8

Regression Model Coefficients

	B	SE	t	p
Organizational Prestige	.546	.056	9.813	.000
Satisfaction	.338	.051	6.586	.000

Research Question 5

The fifth research question was, “What is the relationship between organizational identification and demographic variables of distance alumni?” The demographic variables of age, major and college, academic level, distance from the institution, and multiple degrees were

analyzed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in organizational identity based on demographic variables. This section presents the results of these analyses.

Age. Due to the data failing normality assumptions because of skewness due to high ratings for organizational identification, the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance test was used to determine if there was a mean difference between age at graduation and organizational identity. Table 9 shows that organizational identity was reported slightly higher in alumni as their age at graduation is higher as evidenced by increasing means and medians. There was a statistically significant difference between organizational identity by the age at graduation ($H(4) = 18.380, p = .001$), with a mean rank of 224.57 for ages 20 to 29, 265.70 for ages 30 – 39, 273.43 for ages 40 – 49, 298.33 for ages 50 – 59, and 370.38 for ages 60 and older.

Table 9

Organizational Identification by Age Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
20 - 29 years	121	3.601	0.974	0.089	3.800	1.00	5.00
30 - 39 years	187	3.827	0.946	0.069	4.000	1.00	5.00
40 - 49 years	130	3.864	0.958	0.084	4.167	1.00	5.00
50 - 59 years	80	4.071	0.740	0.083	4.167	1.00	5.00
> 60 years	12	4.389	0.729	0.211	4.500	2.33	5.00

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were then run with the age brackets to determine where the statistical significance exists. The type one error rate was controlled by using a Bonferroni adjustment, which was made by dividing p by the number of comparisons made (10). Full results of these analyses are detailed in Table 10. Results of these analyses indicated that there were statistically significant differences with moderate effect sizes between graduates age 20-29 and age 50-59 ($z = -3.413, p = .001, r = -.241$), and age 60-69 ($z = -3.108, p = .002, r = -$

.269), with younger alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than those who were age 50 – 59 or 60 or older when they received their degree.

Table 10

Organizational Identification by Age Mann Whitney Tests

	20 - 29 years		30 - 39 years		40 - 49 years		50 - 59 years		> 60 years	
	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p
20 - 29 years			-2.258	.024	-2.550	.011	-3.413	.001	-3.108	.002
30 - 39 years					-0.420	.675	-1.596	.111	-2.214	.027
40 - 49 years							-1.135	.256	-2.087	.037
50 - 59 years									-1.781	.075
> 60 years										

Distance from the institution. Due to the data failing normality assumptions because of skewness due to high ratings for organizational identification, the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance test was used to determine if there was a mean rank difference between distance from the institution and organizational identity. Table 11 shows that organizational identity was reported slightly higher in alumni who live less than 50 miles from the institution ($M = 4.102$, $Mdn = 4.333$, $SD = 0.832$). However, there was not a statistically significant difference between organizational identity by distance from the institution ($H(4) = 8.221$, $p = .084$). The difference between the mean ranks was non-significant at the .05 level ($p = .084$).

Table 11

Organizational Identification by Distance Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
<50 miles	59	4.102	0.832	0.108	4.333	1.17	5.00
50 - 99 miles	97	3.696	0.992	0.101	4.000	1.00	5.00
100 - 249 miles	170	3.801	0.961	0.074	4.000	1.00	5.00
250 - 499 miles	58	3.905	0.884	0.116	4.167	1.83	5.00
≥500 miles	146	3.827	0.914	0.076	4.000	1.00	5.00

Major and college. Due to the data failing normality assumptions because of skewness due to high ratings for organizational identification, the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance test was used to determine if there was a mean difference between college graduated from and organizational identity. Full results are displayed in Table 12. There was a statistically significant difference between organizational identity by the college graduated from ($H(8) = 41.075, p < .001$), with a mean rank of 347.61 for the College of Arts and Sciences, 311.74 for the College of Commerce and Business, 202.57 for the College of Communications and Information Sciences, 235.37 for the College of Education, 24.00 for the College of Engineering, 272.79 for the College of Human Environmental Sciences, 252.73 for the School of Law, 284.13 for the College of Nursing, and 171.25 for the School of Social Work.

Table 12

Organizational Identification by College Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Arts and Sciences	33	4.253	0.866	0.151	4.500	1.00	5.00
Business	46	4.105	0.821	0.121	4.333	1.17	5.00
Communications	45	3.407	1.086	0.162	3.500	1.00	5.00
Education	66	3.620	1.031	0.127	4.000	1.00	5.00
Engineering	1	1.833			1.833	1.83	1.83
Human Environmental Sciences	152	3.897	0.868	0.070	4.000	1.17	5.00
Law	24	3.861	0.687	0.140	3.833	2.33	4.83
Nursing	131	3.993	0.767	0.067	4.167	1.00	5.00
Social Work	32	3.140	1.172	0.207	3.083	1.00	5.00

A series of Mann-Whitney U tests were then run with the colleges to determine where the statistical significance exists. The type one error rate was controlled by using a Bonferroni adjustment, which was made by dividing p by the number of comparisons made (36). While this statistical test does not require a certain sample size, it is important to note that the College of Engineering only had one participant. Full results of these analyses are detailed in Table 13. The colleges of Arts and Sciences ($Mdn = 4.500$), Business ($Mdn = 4.333$), and Nursing ($Mdn =$

4.167) reported the highest values for organizational identification while Engineering (*Mdn* = 1.833), Social Work (*Mdn* = 3.083) and Communications (*Mdn* = 3.500) reported the lowest. Results of these analyses indicated that there were statistically significant differences with moderate effect sizes between graduates of Social Work and Arts and Sciences ($z = -3.999$, $p < .001$, $r = -.496$), Business ($z = -3.739$, $p < .001$, $r = -.423$), Human Environmental Sciences ($z = -3.425$, $p = .001$, $r = -.253$), and Nursing ($z = -3.871$, $p < .001$, $r = -.303$), with Social Work alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than alumni from the other colleges. Additionally, results indicated statistically significant differences with moderate effect sizes between graduates of Communications and Arts and Sciences ($z = -3.802$, $p < .001$, $r = -.431$), Business ($z = -3.367$, $p = .001$, $r = -.353$), and Nursing ($z = -3.204$, $p = .001$, $r = -.242$), with Communications alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than alumni from the other colleges.

Table 13

Organizational Identification by College Mann Whitney Tests

	Arts and Sciences		Business		Communications		Education		Engineering		Human Environmental Sciences		Law		Nursing		Social Work	
	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p	Z	p
Arts and Sciences			-1.185	.236	-3.802	.000	-3.166	.002	-1.487	.137	-2.584	.010	-2.721	.007	-2.414	.016	-3.999	.000
Business					-3.367	.001	-2.345	.019	-1.632	.103	-1.539	.124	-1.792	.073	-1.249	.212	-3.739	.000
Communications							-0.981	.327	-1.283	.199	-2.707	.007	-1.597	.110	-3.204	.001	-0.916	.359
Education									-1.505	.132	-1.765	.078	-0.714	.475	-2.119	.034	-2.042	.041
Engineering											-1.634	.102	-1.675	.094	-1.672	.095	-1.211	.226
Human Environmental Sciences													-0.560	.576	-0.656	.512	-3.425	.001
Law															-1.094	.274	-2.298	.022
Nursing																	-3.871	.000
Social Work																		

Academic levels. Due to the data failing normality assumptions because of skewness due to high ratings for organizational identification the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference in the organizational identification of undergraduate alumni and graduate alumni. Results of that analysis, detailed in Table 14,

indicated that there was a statistically significant difference, $z = -4.942$, $p < .001$, with undergraduate alumni reporting a higher organizational identity than graduate alumni. The effect size was moderate ($r = -.215$), indicating an approximate one fifths difference in standard deviation units observed between the two groups.

Table 14

Organizational Identification by Level Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Undergraduate	147	4.145	0.777	0.064	4.333	1.00	5.00
Graduate	383	3.714	0.964	0.049	4.000	1.00	5.00

Multiple degrees. Due to the data failing normality assumptions because of skewness due to high ratings for organizational identification the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference in the organizational identification of multiple degree holders and single degree holders. Results of that analysis, displayed in Table 15, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference, $z = -2.358$, $p = .018$, with multiple degree holders reporting higher organizational identity than single degree holders. The effect size was small ($r = -.102$), indicating an approximate 10 percent difference in standard deviation units observed between the two groups.

Table 15

Organizational Identification by Multiple Degrees Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Single	423	3.783	0.958	0.047	4.000	1.00	5.00
Multiple	107	4.033	0.815	0.079	4.333	1.00	5.00

Summary of Findings

In summary, this chapter presented results of the study conducted to examine how alumni of distance programs behave with regards to organizational identity and financial giving to the institution. Correlational analyses determined that organizational identification is positively related to the supportive behaviors of financial giving and promotion of the institution. Additionally, results indicated that donors reported a higher organizational identity than non-donors. Results from logistic regression found that organizational identification is an influencer of donor status. Using multiple regression analysis, satisfaction and perceived organizational prestige appeared to be significant predictors of organizational identification. The demographic and academic considerations of age at graduation, college of first distance degree, level, and multiple degree status were found to be statistically significant factors impacting organizational identification. Chapter V interprets and discusses the findings presented in this chapter, and offers recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

A study was conducted to investigate how alumni of distance programs at a public state flagship university behave with regards to organizational identity and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the relationship of organizational identity to supportive behaviors including financial giving and promoting the institution. The study also examined the role of the elements of perceived prestige and satisfaction as they relate to distance alumni's organizational identification. This chapter presents a review of the theoretical framework and a discussion of the findings from each research question. Additionally, implications for practice and for further research are shared. Finally, the chapter summarizes the findings followed by a conclusion of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational identification theory served as the framework for this study. The process of organizational identification occurs as the individual perceives oneness with the organization, which acts as a salient social category, and feels that he or she belongs to it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the traditional college population, organizational identification has been shown to influence satisfaction among current students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2013) and influence financial giving, alumni involvement, and promotion of the school to others (Arnett et al., 2003; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013). The survey instrument was created by the researcher using existing instruments to measure organizational identification

(Mael & Ashforth, 1992), perceived prestige, promotion (Arnett et al., 2003), and satisfaction (Wilkins et al., 2015). While previous research has extensively investigated organizational identification and related variables in the traditional student and alumni population, research has not been conducted on non-traditional distance alumni. As such, the survey data and institutional data collected for this study allowed for the comparison of results to previous literature and for the development of recommendations for practice.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, “What is the relationship between organizational identification and supportive behaviors, including financial donations and promotion of the institution, by distance alumni?” This question explored whether higher organizational identification contributes to increased financial giving and increased promotion of the institution to friends and family.

The correlation between organizational identification and average yearly giving was found to be statistically significant. This positive correlation suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are more likely to make financial gifts to the institution. These findings were in line with previous studies involving traditional alumni (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013) and are consistent with findings that similar factors apply to distance students’ propensity to give (Moore, 2014). However, this finding is in contrast with previous research involving commuter students (Newbold et al., 2010) which only indicated partial support for organizational identification and financially donating to join the alumni association. The authors of that study posited that low on-campus involvement rates among commuter students may produce a lack of financial support for the alumni association, despite organizational identification among alumni.

Radcliffe (2011) stated that non-traditional students may feel marginalized at traditional undergraduate centered schools as they may not have the same student experiences available to them. However, this speculation did not appear to materialize in the results of this study.

Results showed a strong positive correlation between organizational identification and promoting the institution, which suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are much more likely to make statements promoting the institution to others. While results have been mixed with regards to the relationship between organizational identification and promotion, the findings were consistent with a number of previous studies conducted with traditional alumni (Arnett et al., 2003; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013).

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “Is there a difference in organizational identity between distance alumni who are donors and those who are non-donors?” This question explored whether there was a difference in overall organizational identification between alumni who have made financial gifts and those who have not. Results analysis indicated that there was a significant difference, with donors reporting higher organizational identity than non-donors. Findings were consistent with previous research that indicated organizational identification as an antecedent to financial donations (Arnett et al., 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Porter et al., 2011; Stephenson, 2013).

Previous research has shown mixed results in determining whether distance alumni are interested in donating financially to their alma mater. Of the original eligible participants, 34.4% of alumni were donors. Of the survey respondents, 53.4% were donors, which was higher than Miller’s (2013) response of 21% donors in a study involving satellite campus alumni, indicating congruence with recent distance alumni research findings that distance alumni do have more

inclination to donate financially to the institution than previously assumed (Johnson, 2013; Morrison, 2013; Whitby, 2014). The increased donor percentage among survey participants is consistent with findings of previous studies among traditional alumni which also used survey responses with institutional data to examine alumni donor behavior (Clotfelter, 2003; Conner, 2005; Hanson, 2000; Holmes, 2009; Ropp, 2014).

Research Question 3

The third research question asked, “What is the relationship between degree of organizational identity and donor/non-donor status of distance alumni?” This question sought to identify the impact of organizational identity on making financial donations to the institution. Results indicated a moderate relationship between organizational identity and donating. Prediction success overall was 67.9% (78.1% for donors and 56.3% for non-donors). When organizational identification is raised by one unit the participant is nearly three more times likely to be a donor. These results are consistent with the previous research with traditional alumni which found that alumni with strong identity are 22.4% more likely to donate than those with weak identity (Stephenson, 2013).

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was “What are the effects of organizational prestige and satisfaction on organizational identification among distance alumni?” This question explored the extent to which prestige and satisfaction contributed to organizational identification. Results found that approximately 36% of the variance in organizational identity can be explained by perceived organizational prestige and satisfaction.

Controlling for satisfaction, the results showed that perceived organizational prestige was a significant predictor of organizational identification. Organizational identification increased by

.546 points for every 1-point increase in organizational prestige. While there has been no previous research into the relationship between prestige and organizational identification in distance alumni, results are consistent with the previous research that found institutional prestige has a positive effect on organizational identity of traditional alumni (Arnett et al., 2003; Hanson, 2000; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Porter et al., 2011) commuter alumni (Newbold et al., 2010), and current students (Kim et al., 2010). While this study did not examine the direct effect of prestige on financial giving, the results are consistent with previous studies that found institutional prestige had a positive effect on giving behavior in both traditional alumni (Clotfelter, 2003) and distance alumni (Moore, 2014).

Controlling for prestige, results also showed that satisfaction was a statistically significant predictor of organizational identification. Organizational identification increased by .338 points for every 1-point increase in satisfaction. While satisfaction was significant, it did not predict increased organizational identification as much as the element of prestige. Previous research with traditional alumni found mixed results for satisfaction's influence on organizational identification, but this research examined elements regarding satisfaction with a traditional student experience that do not translate to distance students (Arnett et al., 2003; Stephenson, 2013). Research with traditional students using a general satisfaction instrument (Wilkins et al., 2015), modified for this study, found a link between organizational identification and satisfaction, with the author positing that increased organizational identification leads to increased satisfaction in the population of current traditional students.

Research Question 5

The last research question asked, "What is the relationship between demographic variables and organizational identification of distance alumni?" The demographic variables of

age, major and college, academic level, distance from the institution, and multiple degrees were analyzed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in organizational identity based on each of the demographic and academic variables.

The results of these tests varied for each variable. Age at graduation was statistically significant, with moderate effect sizes, only between graduates age 20-29 and age 50-59, and 60-69, with younger alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than those who were age 50 – 59 or 60 or older when they received their degree. Distance from the institution was not significant, however organizational identity was reported to be slightly higher in alumni who live less than 50 miles from the institution. Previous research has indicated higher financial giving among graduates living closer to the institution (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Conner, 2005; Holmes, 2009). There were a number of statistically significant differences in organizational identity and the college from which the alumnus graduated. Results of these analyses indicated that there were statistically significant differences with moderate effect sizes between graduates of Social Work and Arts and Sciences, Business, Human Environmental Sciences, and Nursing, with Social Work alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than alumni from the other colleges. Additionally, results indicated statistically significant differences with moderate effect sizes between graduates of Communications and Arts and Sciences, Business, and Nursing, with Communications alumni reporting a lower organizational identity than alumni from the other colleges. These findings are in line with studies that have indicated area of study or academic major (Marr et al., 2005; Monks, 2003) contributes to differing levels of giving behaviors. Additionally, undergraduate alumni reported higher levels of organizational identity than graduate alumni, which is in line with previous research (Johnson,

2013). Finally, there was a statically significant difference with small effect size between the organizational identity of multiple degree holders and single degree holders.

Conclusions

In this study, four primary conclusions emerged as important findings related to the organizational identity and giving behaviors of distance alumni. First, distance alumni do have significant organizational identity to the institution. Previously, it was unknown if distance alumni would have significant organizational identity to their alma mater since they did not have a traditional college experience. The results of this study indicate that participants overwhelmingly rated positive organizational identity towards the institution. This finding suggests that there are elements of the online experience that create significant organizational identity in these alumni, thus implying a significant portion of these alumni's sense of self is associated with being a member of the institutional alumni community.

Secondly, the supportive behaviors of financial giving and promoting the institution are influenced by the organizational identity of distance alumni. The positive statistically significant correlation between organizational identification and average yearly giving suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are more likely to make financial gifts to the institution. Additionally, upon examining the organizational identification between donors and non-donors, results analysis indicated that donors reported statistically significant higher levels of organizational identity than non-donors. Results of the study also indicated a moderate relationship between organizational identity and donating. Results showed a strong positive correlation between organizational identification and promoting the institution, which suggests that distance learning graduates with higher organizational identification are much more likely to make statements promoting the institution to others. Overall, the results of this study

indicate that distance alumni behave in similar ways to traditional alumni with regards to the positive relationship between organizational identity and supportive behaviors.

Third, the elements of institutional prestige and satisfaction are influencing factors on organizational identity of distance alumni. Results found that both variables contribute to approximately 36% of the variance in organizational identification. Organizational identification increased by .546 points for every 1-point increase in organizational prestige, while increasing by .338 points for every 1-point increase in satisfaction. A general satisfaction instrument was chosen for this study because of its applicability for all alumni populations as a general instrument to assess the relationship between overall satisfaction with the college experience and organizational identity. Results of this study indicate that prestige and satisfaction are important antecedents to organizational identification in distance alumni.

Lastly, other factors, related to both demographics and the academic experience, appear to influence the levels of organizational identity in distance alumni. Age at graduation was examined in ten year brackets, and statistical significance in organizational identity was found between alumni who graduated at age 20-29 and those who graduated at age 50-59 and 60-69 (Table 9). College also had a statistically significant impact on organizational identity. The colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, and Nursing reported the highest values for organizational identification while Engineering, Social Work, and Communications reported the lowest (Table 12). However, Engineering cannot reliably be considered, as there was only one response from a College of Engineering graduate. At this institution, the three highest scoring colleges have developed substantial distance programs and devoted considerable staff resources to ensuring student success. All Arts and Sciences survey participants were graduates of the institution's first distance degree program, New College Life Track, which over time developed

into a unique interdisciplinary degree program. As the most mature distance degree program, New College Life Track now operates an active alumni group and giving society, and encourages a high level of alumni engagement through events at football games. Students beginning the program are required to attend an on campus orientation, and are assigned an academic advisor, with whom they have a deep relationship throughout their tenure in the program. Alumni whose first distance degree was an undergraduate degree report moderately higher levels of organizational identification than those whose first distance degree at the institution was a graduate degree (Table 14). In addition to undergraduate alumni historically having higher identity levels, the low identity colleges of Social Work and Communications only had participants from graduate distance degree programs, while the high identity college of Arts and Sciences only had participants from an undergraduate degree program. Alumni with multiple degrees from the institution reported moderately higher organizational identity than single degree holders (Table 15). A graduate who had a positive experience with his or her first degree would likely choose to return for a second degree. Analysis of demographic and academic factors indicate that similar elements including age, college, degree level, and multiple degrees affect organizational identity in distance alumni.

Recommendations for Practice

The institution in this study, along with other colleges and universities, should consider the following recommendations, drawn from the findings of this study. The first recommendation is to devote strategic resources to developing exceptional distance degree programs for current students. First, because distance alumni demonstrate the propensity for high levels of organizational identification and financial giving as alumni, the quality of their student experience should be important to administrators. Quality distance degree programs

affect both of the elements of satisfaction and institutional prestige. As there was a significant difference in organizational identity between colleges, administrators can examine elements of the distance programs in the high organizational identity colleges and replicate this environment for students to have a successful college experience within the other colleges. Some of these differences, including distance student focused academic advisors, orientation opportunities (online or face to face), and connection with faculty and peers, are all important considerations.

Since the results of the study demonstrate that both financial giving and promotion of the institution are influenced by the organizational identity of distance alumni, institutions need to consider facilitating meaningful engagement and community for both current distance students and alumni of distance programs in order to raise organizational identity in the distance population. Other colleges should consider emulating the success of community building that has taken place in New College Life Track. As evidenced by the higher levels of organizational identity, the increased community offered students in this program has a positive effect on their experience. Additional opportunities for administrators in both the colleges and advancement include building capability for distance students and alumni to connect through social media. Since distance students are already engaged online for their coursework, social media presents a unique opportunity for the institution to connect with students and graduates who are not physically near campus. In a whitepaper from Evertrue (2015) detailing the Facebook engagement rankings for Southeastern Conference schools' alumni associations, the institution in this study ranked 14 out of 15 universities. Additionally, the alumni association does not maintain a presence on LinkedIn, another major social networking site, which is an additional opportunity for engagement. LinkedIn is a networking site heavily used by midcareer professionals, a demographic that has large overlap with distance students and alumni. Featuring

stories of distance graduates on social media, or in the alumni and college newsletters, is another way to engage distance alumni and increase feelings of organizational prestige. Increasing social media engagement for both current distance students and distance program alumni is a vital consideration to allow these constituents to become a part of the campus community despite physical distance. This strategy can be crafted at both an institutional level through the alumni association for all distance graduates, and through each college as it relates to opportunities for engagement and networking built for their specific degree program graduates. Considering ways to engage distance alumni in the alumni community is an opportunity to facilitate high organizational identity levels and financial gifts from these constituents.

The third recommendation to raise financial giving levels among distance alumni is to include opportunities that are appropriate to distance alumni in fundraising initiatives. This study has demonstrated that distance graduates have tremendous affinity for the institution, and that as their organizational identity increases, they are more likely to give financially. However, based on the high percentage of non-donors, the institution is missing an opportunity to engage these alumni with fundraising opportunities that speak to their unique experience. Aside from an annual fund solicitation for New College Life Track alumni, the institution does not currently create institutional level, college level, or alumni association fundraising initiatives with distance alumni as the focus. Several years ago, the institution did an acquisition mailing through the annual fund to distance alumni with a donation opportunity to the College of Continuing Studies. However, this initiative was not successful since most distance graduates have no affinity for the College of Continuing Studies, but rather their affinity lies with the college and major program through which their degree was granted. Currently, distance alumni are included in annual fund and alumni association mailings that all alumni of the institution receive, and thus they receive

mailings geared towards alumni with a traditional college experience. Campaigns directed to distance alumni focused on scholarships for distance students, college specific distance programs, and technology initiatives are options to consider. Campaigns for buildings, housing, or on-campus student life fundraising opportunities are not appropriate for distance alumni to receive. Communications with distance alumni should be tailored with specific verbiage relevant to distance graduates rather than invoking imagery and memories of the on campus experience. Additionally, increased collaboration between the various campus stakeholders can create a more cohesive and effective fundraising strategy surrounding distance alumni.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study reveal an important understanding of organizational identity among distance learning graduates. As findings in this study were explored, ideas for expanding and continuing the study surfaced. Recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. This study was limited to one institution, a public state flagship university with a division one athletics program. The study should be replicated at other institutions of varying size, student demographic composition, and different NCAA sports divisions.
2. Additional research can be conducted to explore the differences in the student experience between programs where graduates displayed high levels of organizational identification and programs where graduates displayed low levels of organizational identification.
3. A longitudinal study could be undertaken to understand more about how these participants make decisions related to financial giving to the institution over time.
4. This study chose the elements of organizational prestige and satisfaction to examine as they relate to organizational identity, but there are a number of elements studied in the literature that may be important antecedents of identity in distance studies. Future studies

should examine additional elements to determine their influence on organizational identity.

5. This study focused on quantitative survey data. Future studies could incorporate qualitative data using individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and written responses from participants to gain insight into motivations related to organizational identity and the decision to become a donor.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how alumni of distance programs at a flagship university behave with regards to organizational identity and financial giving to the institution. The study examined the relationship of organizational identity to supportive behaviors including financial giving and promoting the institution. The study also examined the role of the elements of perceived prestige and satisfaction as they relate to distance alumni's organizational identification. Demographic data were also analyzed to assess the effect of these elements on organizational identity.

The overarching finding of this study is that distance alumni do have significant organizational identity to the institution with similar results to previous research conducted with traditional alumni. The supportive behaviors of financial giving and promoting the institution are influenced by the organizational identity of distance alumni. Additionally, the elements of institutional prestige and satisfaction are influencing factors on organizational identity of distance alumni. Other elements, including age, college of graduation, level of degree, and holding multiple degrees from the institution, were found to impact levels of organizational identity in distance alumni.

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APPENDIX A:
SURVEY INSTRUMENT



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
THE CAPSTONE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

When someone criticizes The University of Alabama, it feels like a personal insult.

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I am very interested in what others think about The University of Alabama.

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

When I talk about The University of Alabama, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

The University of Alabama's successes are my successes

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

When someone praises The University of Alabama, it feels like a personal compliment

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

If a story in the media criticized The University of Alabama, I would feel embarrassed

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

People I know think highly of The University of Alabama

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

It is considered prestigious to be an alumnus of The University of Alabama

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

People seeking to advance their careers should downplay their association with The University of Alabama

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

Most people are proud when their children attend The University of Alabama

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I "talk up" The University of Alabama to people I know

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I bring up The University of Alabama in a positive way in conversations I have with friends and acquaintances

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

In social situations, I often speak favorably about The University of Alabama

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

My degree program met all of my expectations

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I am very satisfied with my degree program and would definitely choose it again

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I am very satisfied with my university and would definitely choose it again

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

My choice of university was a wise decision

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

I would recommend my university to friends

Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	-------------------	----------------------------	----------------	----------------

APPENDIX B:

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA* | Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

June 2, 2017

Jennifer Watson
ETPTS
College of Education
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 17-OR-188, "Organizational Identification and Giving Behaviors Among Distance Learning Alumni at a Major Southeastern Public University"

Dear Ms. Watson:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on May 31, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,


Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance