

MOTIVATIONS OF PLANNED GIFT

DONORS: A QUALITATIVE

RESEARCH STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Planned giving is a critical source of funding for higher education institutions. Smaller institutions receive fewer of these gifts in comparison to larger research institutions of higher education. Higher education leaders have recognized these benefits and suggest that these gifts would create a substantial opportunity for changes in smaller institutions. According to the report on the 2019 Survey of College and University Presidents, three-quarters of surveyed college and university presidents expressed the belief that wealthy, elite institutions received a disproportionate amount of large philanthropic gifts, and that smaller, non-elite institutions would benefit more from gifts of this substantial size (Jaschik & Lederman, 2019). In order to create opportunities for smaller institutions of higher education to receive more planned gifts, we need to further understand what motivates a planned gift donor.

This qualitative study sought to understand the motivations of donors to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving through interviews with 17 individuals. Using the social identity theory as my framework, I explored how the perception of connection to or membership in various organizations affected the behavior of deciding to give a planned gift to a small, non-elite institution of higher education. The six themes that emerged through data analysis were: membership through connection, meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition. Participants valued the traditions that are associated with smaller colleges. Additionally, participants were able to recall specific learning experiences in which they heard about planned giving

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family – my dad David, my mom Deborah, my sister Amanda, and my brother Stephen. I will never be able to thank you enough for how you have shaped me as a person. I would not be who I am without each of you. I hope I have made you proud. I love you all.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Planned giving is a critical source of funding for higher education institutions. Large philanthropic gifts such as those gifted through planned giving could create significant changes at an institution. This type of philanthropic gift has the potential to have a transformational effect on nonprofit organizations in a way that a traditional cash gift cannot. Planned giving is a tool that development and advancement staff use to cultivate a major gift to be given to an organization at a future time, most commonly in the form of bequests or trusts. A bequest is a philanthropic gift that is given by means of an individual leaving it to an organization or person in their will. A trust is a legal agreement with a trustee or other third-party that allows an individual to control both who will receive the assets as well as how the assets are distributed. A trust is another method that a donor could use to give philanthropic gifts; however, trusts involve a third-party in order to make sure that assets are distributed according to the wishes of the donor. Donors who choose to give in this way are few in number; however, they account for a large percentage of the total fundraising income (Kottacz, 2003). According to James (2008), about 8% of charitable giving is the result of bequests. However, certain organizations report bequests contributing significantly more to their budgets. In a survey by the Council for Aid to Education (2015), colleges and universities that completed the survey reported that bequests represented nearly 12% of the total individual giving that these institutions received.

A planned gift can provide institutions of higher education with an opportunity to create significant changes for their students and campus community. In the United States, some of the

more prominent institutions such as Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, and The Juilliard School were established as a direct result of an individual leaving a philanthropic gift in their will (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2016). Additionally, planned gifts can make changes at an institution through new constructions on campus. Gifts have been used to create new residence halls, allowing for student enrollment to grow. Also, new facilities such as buildings designated for specific academic programs, research centers, and athletic buildings are built as the result of a planned gift. Donors can designate gifts to establish new academic programs at an institution. Funding for research, technological innovation, and faculty recruitment are also significant improvements on college campuses as a result of planned gifts (Worth et al., 2020).

Planned giving is a type of philanthropic giving strategy used by individual donors that is becoming more common in the United States and Canada; however, smaller institutions receive fewer of these gifts in comparison to larger research institutions of higher education. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education (2021), 40 higher education institutions in the United States raised 41% of voluntary private gift donations in the 2020 fiscal year. Through the use of comparison institutions featured on The National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) website, I searched for reported data on student enrollment numbers at institutions listed as receiving the most voluntary private gifts. Results of this search can be found in Appendix A. Of the top 20 private nonprofit institutions listed by The Chronicle of Higher Education as those raising the most voluntary private gifts, the average student enrollment was 17,461 students. In the United States, as much as 40% of income of nonprofit organizations is from planned gift fundraising (Kottacz, 2003).

Higher education leaders have recognized the benefits of philanthropic gifts to larger institutions and suggest that these gifts would create a substantial opportunity for changes on smaller institutions. According to the report on the 2019 Survey of College and University Presidents, three-quarters of surveyed college and university presidents expressed the belief that wealthy, elite institutions received a disproportionate amount of large philanthropic gifts, and that smaller, non-elite institutions would benefit more from gifts of this substantial size (Jaschik & Lederman, 2019). Worth et al. (2020) described this survey result as an “untapped opportunity for non-elite institutions to expand their reach working together with mega-gift donors who are motivated by the desire to have an impact” (p. 292). Planned gift donors are leaving a legacy with these gifts. The effects of a planned gift have the ability to make transformational changes at a small, non-elite institution.

In order to create opportunities for smaller institutions of higher education to receive more planned gifts, we need to further understand what motivates a planned gift donor. Through planned giving initiatives, donors have the ability to maintain their financial security during life while planning to be charitable upon death. Smaller institutions are more likely to close due to lack of financial resources which is why the effects of planned gift donations and the motivations of these donors to participate in planned giving are of significance.

### **Background**

Philanthropy initiatives in higher education began as partnerships between colleges and universities and the church. Colonial colleges carried out charitable work by providing a Christian education for American Indians. Donors to higher education were less common in this colonial period; however, colleges were able to gain financial support from donors. Wealthy individuals in England were interested in missionary work in America and colonial colleges

provided these individuals an opportunity to donate funds to carry out missionary work through college charitable programs (Thelin, 2019). While the initial goal of these donors may have been to spread Christianity in America, the colonial colleges benefited from donations in order to support these missionary programs.

Fundraising in higher education can be traced back to 1641 when clergymen were sent to England to raise money to support the education of American Indians at Harvard University (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). While one of these clergymen was said to have returned to America with money, the others returned with a request for literature explaining the selling points of Harvard (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). This request for more information and literature on the institution to which the money would be donated is an early example of what the field of advancement would become. Donors are interested in learning about organizations that are asking for financial assistance and how these organization will use the donation to accomplish their goals. This request for literature on the cause produced the precursor to a fundraising brochure.

Since fundraising was not an established career or practice in American higher education during this time, individuals who fundraised for colleges and universities had to be resourceful in order to solicit donations. An example of the resourcefulness of colonial colleges can be seen in the interpretation of the will of Sir Robert Boyle. Boyle's will stated that the rent from his estate should support charitable works, and the executor of the will had the ability to determine how these charitable works would be defined. Thelin (2019) noted that representatives of both Harvard and the College of William and Mary appealed to the executor of the will that their organizations would carry out the wishes of the late Sir Robert Boyle and provide charitable work in the community. While the initial intent of Sir Robert Boyle's will may not have been to

donate to higher education, these representatives were successful in gaining philanthropic support for scholarships for American Indians and operating expenses of the colleges (Thelin, 2019). These funds also became funded scholarships for students who wanted to be missionary teachers among the American Indian people. This example is a planned gift, although Boyle did not realize at the time what the monetary donation would fund. In addition to this early example of monetary philanthropic giving through a will in higher education, many early gifts included specific gifts such as books and art.

Philanthropy in higher education has changed significantly since these early days. Brittingham and Pezzullo (1990) noted that philanthropy in higher education dates back over 350 years, and there have been notable changes to the fundraising process over time. Significant changes in fundraising include the people and organizations who are solicited for donations. While originally churches were the main supporters of higher education, donors are now more likely to be individuals who receive professional solicitations for their gifts to a college or university. The idea of fundraising as charity has evolved into the idea of fundraising as philanthropy.

Charity focuses on an immediate response to need while philanthropy is more strategic and focuses on the goal of fixing a problem in the future. This focus on philanthropy has changed donor attitudes toward giving. Brittingham and Pezzullo (1990) stated, “[p]hilanthropy is distinctively strong in America for reasons that have been associated with religious tradition, democracy, pluralism, and the nurturing of individual effort” (p. 6). Also, philanthropic giving has become increasingly more prevalent at public institutions when it was once confined to private or independent institutions. Another significant change is that fundraising offices now exist to focus on the work of philanthropic giving. While the task of fundraising is still an

additional duty that is expected of college presidents, vice presidents, and dean level positions in higher education, much of this work is now handled by professionals who are trained in this area. There is also more competition between various institutional types to receive funding.

The sources of funding for higher education in the United States have fluctuated over the years. Higher education in the United States has been traditionally supported by sources such as student tuition and fees, churches, and the state, depending on whether the institution is private or public (Worth et al., 2020). In addition to these funding sources, colleges and universities also receive private gifts from donors. Many colleges and universities have a nonprofit tax designation, which aids in encouraging individuals to donate to them. This nonprofit tax designation is the same designation that many charities have which allows the donation to be an income tax deduction (Kim et al., 2011). Fundraising programs in higher education were first established in 1641 at Harvard College in the United States (Cockriel & Kellogg, 1994). Alumni associations date back to 1821 at Williams College; however, the establishment of an alumni giving fund was first established at Yale in 1890 (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). In 1924, Cornell University established the first fundraising program that encouraged individuals to include the university in their will (Palmer, 1937). The establishment of programs such as these allowed colleges and universities to form departments within the institution that had the primary goal of forming partnerships with the goal of including philanthropic donations in addition to developing relationships.

World War I added value to the profession of fundraising. Organizations such as the Red Cross raised millions of dollars in funding to support war relief programs over a period of a little more than a week (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). Fundraising of this magnitude led to the creation of private fundraising firms at the conclusion of the war. Individuals who worked for

private firms began target hires for institutions of higher education. Today, institutions of higher education hire fundraising firms through consultations.

Alumni donations were not common until after World War I when alumni wanted representation on their alma maters governing boards (Drezner, 2006). By gaining representation on a college's governing board, alumni were able to express their opinion about the operations of their alma mater. While there are early examples of institutions that established an alumni association or alumni giving fund, many institutions of higher education reported through a survey in 1936 that they did not have these programs (Brittingham & Pezzullo, 1990). This observation highlights the growth of fundraising programs at many institutions of higher education. Today, it is uncommon for institutions of higher education to not have established alumni giving programs.

Oftentimes, donors in higher education are pictured as a large corporation or well-known educational foundation. These types of organizations are highly communicative about their philanthropic efforts and often recognized for their efforts in the media; however, the largest source of philanthropic donations to higher education institutions is from private individuals such as alumni, family members, and friends of the college or university (Worth, 2002). These many individuals comprise a base of funding support for higher education institutions. Financial support from private individuals is voluntary, unlike the support from government sources. Private donors may choose to designate their donation to be restricted, meaning that the donation should be allocated to a specific program, department, or project. These gifts may also come in the form of an unrestricted gift which leaves the institution with more possibilities for the use of the donation. This type of voluntary support from donors, "...provides the margin of excellence, the element of vitality, that separates one institution from another and allows institutions to

escape from the routinized sameness of fully regulated organizations” (Leslie & Ramey, 1988, p. 118).

Private financial support from institutional stakeholders is an important source of revenue at small private colleges and is becoming increasingly more important for other institutions of higher education. Annual gifts to an institution are among the most visible philanthropic giving programs to alumni and friends of the college or university (Worth, 2002). This type of gift to the institution is solicited by emails, letter mailings, or phone calls to individuals who have donated in the past or those who have been highlighted as an individual who could give in the future. Annual gifts are cultivated by advancement staff and frequently designated to a broad area of need within the college. Sometimes gifts are designated to a specific college area or program. Gifts that are not designated to a specific area are then put to use in the general revenue of the institution (Barr & McClellan, 2011). Campaigns are often employed by advancement offices in order to fund a new program or new facility on the campus, and campaigns can last for a number of years to accomplish a specific monetary goal.

In addition to annual gifts, donors may also be interested in making a major gift, a principal gift, or an ultimate gift to the institution. While these types of donors are fewer in number, they provide support for institutions’ larger projects. A *major gift* is a relative term and defined by the individual donor based on their capacity to give (Worth, 2002). For example, some donors may consider a \$10,000 or \$15,000 gift to be a major one, while others would consider a gift over \$100,000 to constitute a major philanthropic gift. The terms *principal gift*, *mega-gift*, and *transformational gifts* have all been developed as terms to describe the magnitude of a large gift that has the capacity to make a significant change to a campus community. While an annual donor to an institution of higher education may be consistent in their philanthropic

giving each year, a major or principal gift donor has the capacity to make significant changes to a campus, such as a physical change or a departmental improvement. According to Worth (2002), *ultimate gifts* are “the largest philanthropic commitment the giver is capable of making” (p. 83). Many major, principal, and ultimate gifts are considered to be planned gifts to an institution of higher education.

A *planned gift* is a unique form of giving and is more popular in the United States as compared to other countries. These gifts are unique because they offer benefits to both the donor and the recipient organization or institution. The institution benefits from the opportunity the gift provides in making improvements or other changes to campus. The donor often benefits from incentives such as tax breaks. Donors who give through planned gifts are able to donate this sizable amount due to their accumulated wealth rather than just their current income (Bennett, 2004). In fact, the growth of planned giving in the United States is attributed to the growing number of wealthy individuals. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of millionaires in the United States doubled in number (Bennett, 2004).

Certain individuals are more likely than others to become planned gift donors. Bennett (2004) noted that planned gifts are most often contributed to charitable organizations by wealthy individuals who are older in age. In fact, Midlarsky and Hannah (1989) suggested that older individuals are more likely to give than younger individuals as long as they have the means to make donations. Additionally, older individuals give more than other age groups in proportion to their income (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). As the population of the United States continues to age, it will be important for advancement staff to have information regarding planned giving opportunities to share with college and university constituents.

Institutions of higher education employ staff members who oversee fundraising initiatives, and in some cases, institutions have offices that specifically handle large gifts, including planned gifts. Caboni (2012) suggested that professional advancement staff members are responsible for both the welfare and integrity of their institution and the institution's donors. Staff members have the autonomy to choose their solicitation strategy, yet it is the responsibility of more senior staff members and the institution to ensure that techniques align with the college/university mission. Advancement offices in higher education employ a variety of models and strategies that are specific to their target donor population. Halligan (2008) suggested that the more successful fundraising campaigns are supported by leaders throughout the college and top-down support filters through to all levels of staff members. These types of strategies range from techniques employed by professional staff members to student-led initiatives. Fundraising strategies may also differ between the institutional types of public, private, and community colleges.

An advancement team typically measures the effectiveness of their staff members' work by the amount of money that is raised, the number of calls and contacts an individual makes, and the number of proposals submitted and closed (Hiles, 2010). The most common philanthropic gift strategy is a cash gift such as a capital fundraising campaign or a benefit fundraiser (Prince & File, 1994). A giving strategy such as a cash gift is a common fundraising technique because most donors are familiar with organizational giving before they transition to larger philanthropic gifts. The amount of money raised by an institution is considered to be the traditional method of measuring success within advancement offices; however, as Hiles (2010) noted, gifts to a college are often unpredictable and influenced by a variety of factors. Institutions that are smaller in size

have fewer resources and therefore cannot employ a large staff in order to cultivate these gifts, making the success of advancement offices at smaller institutions crucial.

Small, private colleges often rely heavily on student enrollment and revenues of tuition and fees to determine their operating budgets each fiscal year. The size of an institution as determined by the number of full-time students enrolled is a strong predictor of philanthropic giving in higher education (Liu, 2006). Institutions with lower student enrollment numbers must be intentional in their efforts to create relationships with their alumni in order to build a strong donor foundation. Fundraising success is affected by the current condition of the economy (Barr & McClellan, 2011). Donor income can be affected by the state of the economy which in turn affects their financial capacity to donate to the organization. According to Barr and McClellan (2011), small private colleges that cannot withdraw from their endowments when enrollments are low are particularly vulnerable to budget cuts. Smaller institutions are more likely to close due to a lack of financial resources. This suggests that smaller colleges and universities must be more creative with the methods they employ to solicit donations. It further suggests that smaller institutions could experience significant changes on their campuses due to large gifts such as those typically given by a planned gift donor.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Planned gifts are gifts designated for use at a later date by the donor and are frequently larger sums of money or a portion of an individual's estate. Oftentimes, these gifts are pursued by nonprofit organizations after they have built a strong relationship with the donor because of the complex process that planned giving entails. There are certain complexities that are specific to this type of philanthropic giving such as the involvement of the donor's personal financial or legal advisor (Prince & File, 1994). While planned giving is a less common form of

philanthropic giving, donors are highly interested in learning more about this specific type of charitable giving (Prince & File, 1994).

Each year, the amount of tuition discounts that institutions offer grows in order to keep student enrollment numbers consistent with budget goals. The National Association of College and University Business Officers (2020) estimated that the average tuition discount rate for first-time undergraduate students will rise to 53.9% in the 2020-2021 academic year. As public funding for colleges and universities continues to decrease, the need for private funding opportunities increases (Nyman et al., 2018). Cheslock and Gianneschi (2008) demonstrated this reality through the use of data from both the Voluntary Support to Education survey (VSE) and IPEDS. Findings suggested that a reduction in state funding did not result in an increase in the amount of private gifts to the institution.

Fundraising plays a significant role in the success and preservation of colleges and universities. Cultivation of donors is important to the future of smaller higher education institutions, especially if those donors plan to give larger sums of money in the future. Many small, non-elite institutions of higher education do not have an office dedicated to soliciting planned gifts from donors. Colleges and universities that do not have resources dedicated to philanthropic initiatives of planned giving are missing a rich opportunity to cultivate donors. This research adds to the literature that is available on planned gift donors at small, non-elite colleges and offers more specific insight on the topic for advancement staff who may need guidance in order to solicit donors like the ones who participated in this study.

Research is often focused on general alumni giving to an alma mater each fiscal year rather than a planned gift such as an estate gift or will. Planned gift donors often designate large amounts of money to institutions to be distributed at a later date. Because of the large dollar

amount, these gifts have a greater potential to provide funding for significant changes on college and university campuses than other gifts. Planned gifts give colleges and universities the ability to complete projects that may be beyond their budget. In order to cultivate relationships with donors and encourage additional planned gifts, an analysis of the motivations of current planned gift donors will be beneficial to the practice of fundraising in higher education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to gain insight into the motivations of donors who choose to participate in planned giving philanthropy initiatives at smaller, non-elite institutions of higher education. This study specifically focused on the motivations of donors who participate in the less common philanthropic initiative of planned giving. Furthermore, the donors of interest participated in planned giving at Southeastern College, a small private institution with low student enrollment. Prior research indicates that planned gifts have the potential to create significant changes on campuses of smaller colleges, yet these colleges experience far fewer gifts than colleges with larger student enrollments. A study focused on a population of donors at a college with lower enrollment that has experienced campus improvements as a result of planned gifts will add to the available literature on fundraising techniques in the field of higher education.

Additionally, knowledge of the fundraising tool of planned giving is of importance to advancement and development staffs at institutions of higher education. This study may provide insights to staff that oversees fundraising at small institutions regarding donor motivation to pursue a planned gift instead of or in addition to an annual gift. Prior research on the topic of donor motivations indicates that donors are not motivated by a singular reason to give. Donors are motivated by both internal and external factors. Smaller institutions are more likely to close

due to a lack of financial resources which is why the motivations of these donors to participate in planned giving are of significance. Awareness of the motivations of planned gift donors will provide advancement offices at small colleges the ability to use their professional skills in fundraising to cultivate future gifts for their institution.

### **Research Questions**

I analyzed the main research question of what motivates donors to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving. Of particular interest were the various motivations that donors to colleges and universities had when giving to the institution, specifically small institutions of higher education. In order to gain further insight on the topic of donor motivations, I analyzed the following questions:

- (1) What motivates donors to participate in planned giving philanthropic initiatives at small colleges?
- (2) What are specific experiences that donors describe as important to their decision to make a planned gift?

### **Significance**

Descriptions of donor motivations to participate in planned giving initiatives at small private colleges represent significance for this study. Understanding these motivations is significant for practitioners and researchers in higher education as they navigate the changes in enrollment, revenue, and the economy each year.

For practitioners in the field of higher education, specifically offices that assist with fundraising or advancement initiatives in some capacity, this research will provide insight into the motivations that donors have for giving to a college or university. In turn, these insights can assist practitioners when preparing a strategy to solicit funds from potential and current donors.

The motivations of donors to participate in and model the behavior of planned giving have potential to encourage other donors to utilize this same method of philanthropic giving. In addition, practitioners who work closely with enrolled students on a day-to-day basis may be able to facilitate experiences that lead to philanthropic giving later in life. This is especially important because graduates of smaller, non-elite institutions may not transition to higher paying jobs and therefore, may not have as much money to give. Therefore, institutions may have to rely more on planned giving as a source of funding. Planned giving is a form of philanthropic giving that is less common than annual giving in higher education, yet it offers donors an opportunity to leave a legacy of something greater than a one-time gift.

Additionally, it often takes a while for planned gifts to matriculate. Senior leaders do not always invest in tomorrow because their job performance is judged by the gifts that they are receiving during their time of employment. Planned giving helps to smooth out volatility and take the pressure off enrollment each year, but also allows for long-term strategic planning for viability and the longevity of the collegiate mission.

There is also increased pressure on advancement offices in higher education to fundraise in order to meet budget goals each year. Tuition discounts that steadily increase each year are necessary in order to keep student enrollment at a level that will allow colleges and universities to make enough revenue to operate. Tight budgets increase competition for incoming students of colleges and universities each year.

This study may offer researchers more insight into the planned giving process at institutions of higher education. The information will allow researchers to expand the study to other entities in the future, such as philanthropic organizations or corporations, and compare the motivations of the donors for these organizations. The focus on motivation to give to an

organization in a specific capacity will offer researchers insight into the decision-making process that coincides with philanthropic giving.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

This section provides an overview of the current literature related to fundraising at institutions of higher education. Many non-profit organizations benefit from private gifts from their donor base. Data from the Independent Sector indicate that in 1990 the total amount of monetary donations to nonprofit organizations was \$122.6 billion, and 90% of these donations originated from private donors (Rose-Ackerman, 1996). A further breakdown of this number indicates that \$7.8 billion was given in the form of a bequest (Rose-Ackerman, 1996). Religious organizations received 62.2% of household gift contributions in 1993, followed by educational organizations at 11.5% (Rose-Ackerman, 1996).

I examined published peer reviewed research studies and reports and then organized the literature into themes of: characteristics of donors, donor motivations, alumni giving in higher education, philanthropist strategies for affiliate groups in higher education, and advancement staff. I sought to fill the gap in the literature by conducting qualitative research on the motivations of donors to philanthropically give to a small institution of higher education with low enrollment in the form of a planned gift.

**Characteristics of Donors**

Donors respond differently to donation solicitation requests based upon their style of decision-making. In a qualitative constant comparative analysis, a sample of 90 individuals that varied in age were asked to read a scenario and write down their response to the scenario,

including their thoughts about the decision-making process (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001). The scenario was a description of an individual checking their mailbox and receiving a donation solicitation letter. Participants were asked to describe what their likely actions and thoughts would be in a scenario similar to the one described in this study. Interviewers were present in order to ask participants probing questions. Researchers used a constant comparative analysis in grounded theory to identify themes in participants' responses (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001). Based on responses to the scenario, researchers sorted participants into three categories: 'analysts', 'relationists', and 'internalists' (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001).

'Analysts' focused on both the organization and the cause they were asked to support. They expressed a higher level of evaluation of the organization before making a decision to donate. 'Relationists' paid specific attention to the organization that was soliciting donations. The cause of the organization was of less importance. Finally, 'internalists' did not evaluate the cause or organization in the scenario. Instead, they kept the solicitation letter and made a donation at some point if they recognized the name of the asking organization. These three types of donors highlight the importance of asking organizations to be familiar with potential donors. Familiarity with the organization was the most described motivation for donating in this research study.

Certain individuals are more likely than others to donate to charitable organizations. Demographic characteristics, such as age, have been associated with an individual's likelihood to participate in charitable giving. In a pair of experiments conducted by Midlarsky and Hannah (1989), the relationship between donor age and their likelihood to donate was examined in a naturalistic setting. In the first experiment, 2,715 participants were asked by either a pregnant person or a non-pregnant person to donate to an organization that supported infants with birth

defects by placing money in a canister (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). Results from this first experiment indicated that individuals from ages 45 to 64 donated, on average, a higher amount of money than the remaining donors in the experiment (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). In the second experiment, the canister used to collect donations was replaced with a machine with a lever. In this experiment, 2,635 participants were asked by either a pregnant person or a non-pregnant person to pull the lever on a machine to indicate their support for infants with birth defects by donating to the organization (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). Additionally, participants were informed that each lever pull would result in a .05 cent donation from a supporting merchant in the area (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). Results from the second experiment indicated that donors over the age of 75 years old donated, on average, a higher amount of money than younger donors. Overall, older individuals donated more to charitable organizations.

The amount given to a charitable organization is also influenced by whether the individual is the sole person responsible for household finances or if the responsibility is shared between married couples. In 1992 and 1994, Andreoni et al. (2003) used household surveys that measured giving and volunteering behaviors to determine how the primary financial decision maker in a household influences charitable giving. Household surveys included a sample of 2,560 married couples that answered questions which included variables that were important to the research study (Andreoni et al., 2003). Survey results indicated that when there was a sole person in charge of making the financial decisions in a household, the charitable donations from that household often reflected the values of the person making the decisions (Andreoni et al., 2003). In other words, if the charitable organization was of importance to the primary financial decision maker, it was likely that the household would donate to that organization. Some married couples in this study reported that the financial decisions in the household were joint decisions.

In these households, a compromise was made between individuals when deciding where they would donate. Based on survey results, this compromise resulted in males achieving their preference in donating to a charitable organization 68% of the time and the female achieving their preference in donating to a charitable organization 26% of the time (Andreoni et al., 2003). Overall there was a 6% decrease in the amount of money donated when the couple had to make decisions between charitable organizations (Andreoni et al., 2003). Research findings indicated that charitable organizations must appeal to both parties when a couple is sharing financial decisions in order to maximize the donation to their organization.

Alumni of an institution are another group of individuals that are likely to give to a college or university upon graduation. In a quantitative study by Lara and Johnson (2014), data profiles for 27,632 alumni of Colorado College were shared with researchers to develop a profile for a likely alumni donor. Results from data analysis indicated that location of the alumni in relation to the institution was of importance. Additionally, researchers reported that wealthy alumni were less likely to give; however, when they choose to give it is a larger amount than the average donation to the institution (Lara & Johnson, 2014). Consistent with prior research, older individuals were more likely to donate, specifically in the age range of 49 to 66 (Lara & Johnson, 2014).

Prior research has also focused on the giving behaviors of alumni donors that received varying levels of financial aid while enrolled as an undergraduate student. Marr et al. (2005) used data of 2,822 individuals who graduated from Vanderbilt University between the years of 1988 and 1990. The development office at the university provided all data on this group of participants' giving behavior, including amounts, dates, if the gift was designated to a specific fund, and other information regarding the gift. The different financial aid variables for the study

included need-based scholarships, merit-based scholarships, and need-based loans. The different types of financial aid variables in this study appeared to influence a donor's giving behavior more than the total amount of the various aid opportunities received. An individual who received any type of need-based loan while enrolled as an undergraduate student in college was 8% to 16% less likely to donate during the eight years immediately following their graduation from the institution (Marr et al., 2005). However, a need-based scholarship increased the probability that a graduate would give by 5% to 13% (Marr et al., 2005). Results such as these suggest that another aspect of the undergraduate experience, financial aid, affects an individual's decision to donate to their alma mater upon graduation.

The academic major of study that an alumni declared while enrolled as an undergraduate student is also a demographic characteristic that may influence an individual's level of giving upon graduation. Researchers distributed a survey to alumni of a journalism program at a public, four-year university located in the Midwestern United States. Participants were given the opportunity to complete the survey on paper or online. Of the 1,600 journalism alumni who were asked to complete the survey, 286 participants returned surveys either through mail or the online portal (Tsao & Coll, 2005). The dependent variable in the study was participants' intent to donate to the journalism program at the institution. The independent variables were demographic characteristics of participants, perceptions of and confidence in the current journalism program, and interaction with the journalism program. Tsao and Coll (2005) analyzed results using the statistics program, SPSS. Results indicated that an alumnus of the journalism program's intent to give was positively correlated with their perceptions of the current program. Additionally, alumni who were involved in the journalism program as a mentor to a current student or chose to sign up for email communications were also positively correlated with the intent to donate to the

program (Tsao & Coll, 2005). The results of this study indicated that maintaining a relationship with a donor and a positive perception of current university programming could increase the likelihood of a donor's intent to give money to the college or university.

Employers also have the opportunity to encourage donations from their employees while at the workplace. In a qualitative case study that occurred at a financial institution in the southern United States, an institution with a known history of advocating for charitable giving in the workplace, Smith (2013) used multiple data collections methods to describe the attitudes and behaviors of employee donations. The author also considered how encouragement from employers to participate in giving initiatives might influence these behaviors. Data were collected through document analysis, individual interviews, and interviews with a focus group. Document analysis included items such as newsletters, reports, the company website, fundraising promotions, and the employee handbook. A total of 44 individuals completed the interview process for this research study, either through an individual or group interview (Smith, 2013). Of the study participants, 32 engaged in individual interviews which ranged from 30 minutes to two hours in length (Smith, 2013). Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions; questions were loosely structured and centered on participant attitudes toward giving philanthropically as well as how their attitudes may have been influenced by their employers. Focus groups included 17 interview participants, including some participants who had previously participated in individual interviews with the researchers (Smith, 2013). Focus group interviews, like individual interviews, included questions that focused on employee attitudes toward philanthropic giving and how these attitudes may have been influenced by their employer.

Smith (2013) analyzed data using thematic analysis. There were two themes that emerged over the course of data analysis. First, participants expressed the feeling that “their eyes had been

opened” to the importance of giving (Smith, 2013, p. 137). Second, participants noted that they gave more because of the influence of their employer. Participants cited the ways in which they gave more including volunteer time, money, and support to charities (Smith, 2013). Study results indicate that the influence of one’s employer may be an important factor for individuals when making the decision to give to an organization. Results also suggest that the values an institution holds in high regard may also be of importance to the employees of the institution.

Faculty and staff that work at an institution of higher education may also have a dual role as an alumnus of the institution. In a quantitative study, Borden et al. (2014) extracted data from institutional records including alumni systems, donor systems, and human resources systems to examine the giving characteristics of campus donors. Of the 17,038 individuals who had donated to the university at least once during the time period of 2009 to 2011, 31.1% of donors were employed at the university (Borden et al., 2014). Additionally, 32.6% of university employees were also alumni of the institution (Borden et al., 2014). Of the employees that donated to the institution, 44% of donors came from employees who were also university alumni (Borden et al., 2014). The overlapping roles of being an alumnus of the institution and also employed as a faculty or staff member is unique. This type of relationship creates potentially an even greater connection than that of solely being an alumnus of the institution.

Wunnava and Okunade (2013) examined the relationship between an individual’s chosen career paths upon graduation with their giving patterns to higher education. Researchers collected data from 394 alumni of a college located in the east south central United States who were employed as business executives over the years 1970 to 1995 (Wunnava & Okunade, 2013). Data included items such as the giving history of the individual, Greek affiliation, current job title, the level of engagement that the alumni currently had with the institution, and other

descriptive characteristics. Additional data were collected on athletic success at the institution so that a comparison could be made regarding the amount of donations received in an athletic championship year versus a non-championship year.

A regression analysis indicated that male business executives gave almost 9% more than female business executives (Wunnava & Okunade, 2013). Membership in a Greek organization while in college also increased alumni donations by 5.6%. Additionally, individuals who held titles such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or president of a company gave 6.3% more than alumni who had lesser titles (Wunnava & Okunade, 2013). A higher level of involvement with the institution as an alumni increased the average donation from an alumni by 20.5% (Wunnava & Okunade, 2013). Based on data collected regarding athletic championships at the institution, researchers determined that alumni gave 82% more in the years that the institution won either a baseball or football championship compared to years when the athletic teams did not win championships (Wunnava & Okunade, 2013). Study findings are consistent with prior research that indicates overall alumni involvement increases levels of giving and athletic successes increase the likelihood of giving to an institution of higher education.

In a study by Harvey (2010), the author discussed approaches that interviewers could take when interviewing elite individuals. Study data were collected through a literature review of previously published literature in the field of social sciences as well as from personal experience that the author gained through doctoral and postdoctoral work (Harvey, 2010). The first problem that Harvey (2010) addressed was the issue that many have in defining the characteristics of an elite individual. The definition of an elite individual is one that constantly changes depending on society. Harvey (2010) then discussed the challenge of gaining access as a researcher to interview elite individuals. To gain access, Harvey (2010) identified the use of a gatekeeper.

Harvey (2010) identified another challenge of speaking with an elite individual: the tension between sharing one's personal viewpoint versus the viewpoint of the company or organization they represent. Overall, Hardy (2010) concluded that the best approach to interview an elite individual would likely vary with each interview.

### **Donor Motivations**

In a literature review of over 500 research articles, Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) identified eight factors that have been widely cited as those that influence and drive an individual to give to a charitable organization. This literature review was designed in order to gather information regarding the researchers' main question of why donors choose to donate money to charitable organizations. Their authors identified the following eight key factors: awareness of need, solicitation, the costs and benefits of donating, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, and efficacy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). The authors searched several online search engines using the keywords *donations*, *philanthropy*, *charitable giving*, *charitable behavior*, *altruism*, *helping*, and *prosocial behavior* in their search of the literature (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). The authors distinguished between survey studies and experimental studies over the course of their literature review. Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) suggested that experimental studies achieve results that are not able to be generalized to a larger population and that survey studies do not allow the researcher to determine the causation of the behavior of donating. It is likely that several of these factors are combined when a donor is making the decision to donate. However, the primary factor that motivates individuals to donate was unclear from the literature review that was executed.

Bendapudi et al. (1996) used prior research to develop a conceptual framework of helping behavior and a process map of making helping decisions. The conceptual suggested that

antecedents, or factors that are controlled by the charitable organization, are combined with uncontrollable moderators which results in a behavior and then a consequence. The authors described the helping decisions making process as one that is not linear (Bendapudi et al., 1996). Rather, the process consists of four steps: perception, motivation, behavior, and consequences. The first step of perceptions begins when an individual determines that an organization needs help. This determination often comes from past experiences in which someone needed help that is similar to the situation at hand or from gaining the information by being told that someone or some organization needs help. The second step of motivation was described by the authors as being motivated by either egoistic or altruistic motivations (Bendapudi et al., 1996). Egoistic motivation is based on a person's concern for their own self. This means that the individual is motivated to donate by results such as gaining recognition or avoiding punishment. Alternatively, altruistic motivation has a focus of helping the person or organization in need without considering the well-being of the individual's own person.

After an individual is motivated, they take action individual behavior. This behavior is either to help or not help the person or organization that needs assistance. The authors suggested that the behavior aspect of this process is influenced by a cost-benefit analysis (Bendapudi et al., 1996). A cost-benefit analysis may affect the degree to which the person helps. In other words, an individual could donate money one time or commit to volunteering at an organization once a month. The fourth and final step of the process is the consequences of helping. In this process, the authors described the consequences of helping as the likelihood of the individual to continue to help in the future. The formalization of a helping process map such as this could help determine the helping behaviors and consequences of these behaviors for donors with various motivations.

Donors do not have a singular motivation to give to institutions of higher education. In a study conducted by Stephenson and Bell (2014), donors indicated through survey results that their top reasons for donating were based on the following: being an alumnus of the institution, giving back to the university, and helping students currently enrolled at the college/university. The authors examined the relationship between university branding and motivations of institutional donors using the lens of social identity theory and self-congruity theory. Stephenson and Bell (2014) compiled survey data from a survey issued by the Offices of Alumni and Development at a midsized university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The survey was distributed to 45,015 alumni with active email addresses, and 2,763 of returned surveys were used for the purpose of the authors' research study (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). Survey results indicated that alumni who more strongly identified with the university brand were more likely to donate to the university (Stephenson & Bell, 2014).

In other words, consistency in collegiate logos or mascots increased the likelihood of alumni gifts back to the college or university. Participants were able to express via written-in qualitative commentary reasons why they chose to not donate to the university. Results indicated that 11% of these individuals did not donate because they had lost their connection with the college, which included statements regarding both physical campus changes and mascot changes (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). Of the donors surveyed, 68% of participants stated that they donated because they were an alumni of the university; 47% of participants donated in order to give back to the university; and 43% of participants donated to help enrolled students (Stephenson & Bell, 2014).

A donor's perceived identity is an important component of what motivates them to donate to an organization. In a quantitative research study, Drezner (2018) used previously

collected data from the survey of the National Alumni Giving Experiment (NAGE), which resulted in 1,621 responses from participants. The NAGE experiment evaluated the attitudes of responding participants toward a fictional donation solicitation letter presented from the individual's alma mater (Drezner, 2018). The letter included descriptions of fictitious students and their unique merits or needs (Drezner, 2018). Survey participants were asked to read the letter and evaluate their attitude toward the letter and their likelihood to donate to the college.

Drezner (2018) developed the theoretical framework of philanthropic mirroring which suggests that if the social identity of the fictitious student in the solicitation letter one that the study participant shares, they would be more likely to attach a perceived importance to the letter which would increase their likelihood of donating to their alma mater. Study findings indicated that not all social identities elicited a philanthropic response from potential donors. There was an increase in perceived importance of the solicitation letter when marginalized identities (need-based) of study participants were mirrored rather than privileged identities (merited-based) (Drezner, 2018). These findings suggested the importance of shared identities, specifically marginalized identities, as a motivation for making a donation to an institution of higher education. This observation suggests that more research is needed on motivations of donors who share a privileged identity or merit-based identity with student profiles and biographies used in annual solicitation letters.

Donors are motivated both by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In an empirical quantitative study conducted, Kottacz (2003) designed a questionnaire to analyze the charitable attitudes and giving behaviors of young, affluent males in London, England. This questionnaire was distributed using the Human Resources department of four banks and one law firm, which resulted 158 usable questionnaires from young male employees at these organizations (Kottacz,

2003). The questionnaire asked demographic questions. Respondents were also instructed rank various combinations of donor products. These combinations focused on aspects such as personal involvement with the charity, the type of cause, the reputation of the charity, and if there were benefits offered to the donor if they chose to donate to the charity (Kottacz, 2003). The researcher used conjoint analysis through SPSS to analyze the results of the section of the questionnaire which ranked combinations of donor products.

Overall, the type of cause was of most importance to this group of donors, followed by benefits offered to the donor. In this study, the arts were the most common cause for donor support. Kottacz (2003) suggested that results from the questionnaire indicated that donors preferred to donate to organizations that gave them a detailed explanation of what the donor's gift was supporting. This study demonstrated a sample of participants who were more highly motivated by an extrinsic factor, such as benefits offered to the donor in return for their donation, as compared to donors who were motivated by intrinsic factors.

Harbaugh (1998) offered an alternative explanation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations by referring to these concepts as *intrinsic motivation* and *prestige motivation*. Prestige motivation described recognition and public benefits that a donor may receive in return for their donation to an organization. In this quantitative study, data were collected from 223 graduates of an anonymous prestigious law school. Study findings were based on responses from 146 of these graduates. Donations to this anonymous college were publicized based on category. For example, an institution may classify their donation categories as any donation in the range of \$500-\$999, which would place the donor in "Donation Class X" while a donation ranging from \$1,000-\$1,499 would place the donor in the category of "Donation Class Y".

In this study, donor categories included \$500, \$1,000, \$2,500, and \$5,000 (Harbaugh, 1998). Donors who gave more than these amounts were excluded from the study. Harbaugh (1998) used an estimated utility function to compare a donor's predicted donation under a plan in which the donation was not publicly reported compared to a plan in which the donation amount was publicly reported (Harbaugh, 1998). Study results supported the researcher's hypothesis that some donors were motivated to donate because of the motivation of prestige. Results indicated that the brackets or categories of potential donations were of importance to some donors. This finding suggests that materials sent to solicit donations should include an explanation of the different donation brackets in order to encourage those who are motivated by prestige to donate. Nevertheless, the researcher indicated that the sample of participants in this study could have been more motivated by prestige than the general population because of their careers in law.

Donors may also be motivated to donate based upon the actions and pressure of their peers. Meer (2011) collected alumni giving data from an anonymous university that covered the years 1983 to 2007. All names were removed from alumni records by the development office at the university before data were provided to the researcher. Along with the alumni record of giving to the university, the development office also provided characteristics of each individual including major field of study, other post-graduate education, undergraduate involvement, and others.

Overall, the sample consisted of 139,869 donations from 18,060 alumni between 1983 and 2007 (Meer, 2011). The fundraising year for this anonymous institution began on the first day of July each year. Data collected from the development office indicated that the majority of gifts at this particular university were given over the course of the month of June if the donor had not previously donated. The strategy that this alumni office used beginning in June was to select

individuals who had already donated to be lead solicitors and contact other alumni to encourage them to donate to the institution. These solicitations occurred mostly by phone and were made from teams that ranged from eight to 60 people. Since there was a personal solicitation effort in June, donors who gave during that time frame were the focus of the study.

Study results indicated that personal solicitation efforts, or peer pressure, had a strong effect on a donor's likelihood to give. Strategies such as asking a lead solicitor to contact their roommate from college and asking them to make a donation affected both the decision to donate and the average amount of the gift (Meer, 2011). Overall, study findings suggest that a donor may be motivated to give to an institution because they were asked to by someone with whom they have had a personal relationship, which could be viewed as pressure from one's peers.

Oftentimes, donors are motivated to give to a specific program within a college or university. Kim et al. (2011) examined the motivations of donors to university performing arts programs. In this study, 1,771 participants from 14 different university partners completed an online survey. The survey instrument solicited data regarding transactions between the donor and university, the amount of donations, the affiliation of the donor to the university, donor motivation, donor benefits, and donor demographics (Kim et al., 2011). A regression analysis indicated that donor giving behavior was significantly related to motivations of both community and university support and individual rewards for the donor. Individual rewards consisted of factors such as advance notice of shows, priority seating, and parking privileges. Study results indicated that donors who gave to performing arts programs enjoyed extrinsic rewards in return for their donation.

Another program that commonly receives donations is campus athletics. Fisher (2009) noted, "[s]pectator sports may well influence an increase in both the quantity and the quality of

applications and the number and size of donations, especially from alumni” (p. 45). Athletic successes for colleges and universities may bring in donations specific to athletic teams in terms of donations specific to a team’s budget or even to improve facilities such as stadiums, locker rooms, or fields. In order to more closely examine the motivations of athletic program donors, Tsiotsou (2007) mailed a questionnaire to 800 individuals who had donated to an athletic program at a large Eastern university in the United States. A total of 383 questionnaires were returned with data that measured motivation, involvement with the campus athletic programs, demographics, giving, and donor values (Tsiotsou, 2007). Belongingness was the most frequently cited donor. The factor of belongingness refers to “motives related to identification, loyalty to an association with the university” (Tsiotsou, 2007, p. 86). Since donors in the study expressed loyalty to the university through their donor motivations, it would be beneficial to form relationships with donors in similar ways for donors who did not give to a specific program within the institution.

Athletic program alumni are a specific type of donor who are common in higher education. Holmes et al. (2008) used empirical analysis to assess certain variables that may have influenced a donor to give to a college. Of specific interest to the researchers were the differences in giving patterns of athletes and non-athletes. The researchers obtained alumni giving data from the Development Office at Middlebury College from the years 1990 to 2004 (Holmes et al., 2008). Records included data for 22,641 living alumni who donated to the college. In addition to a history of a donor’s giving patterns, these data included items such as demographic information, current employment information, and information on what activities the individual was involved in while enrolled as an undergraduate student. The researchers also collected data on the years during the time period of 1990 to 2004 in which the football or

hockey teams won a major championship. Results indicated that individuals who participated in athletics while enrolled in college were 22% more likely to give than those that did not participate in athletics (Holmes et al., 2008). Results also indicated that former athletics were more likely to donate than those who participated in social clubs while in college, but less likely to donate than those who were in leadership positions on campus or those who participated in fundraising initiatives while they were undergraduate students. Winning seasons in football did not produce an influx of donations to the college; in fact, alumni were less likely to give. Hockey winning seasons, however, produced an increase in alumni donations to the college. Research studies such as this highlight the differences, however slight, in what may motivate a person to choose to donate. Former athletes are a large group of alumni at many institutions of higher education and their motivation to donate may be a key factor in determining fundraising strategies in offices of advancement.

Donors categorized as *mega-gift donors* similarly have a variety of motivations to give to institutions of higher education. Worth et al. (2020) categorized a sample of 30 donors as mega-gift donors due to their listing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* list of the largest gifts to higher education in 2018. Researchers analyzed public news media documents in order to create donor biographies by searching the donor name and recipient institution on the Nexis Uni database (Worth et al., 2020). Two experts, one in higher education fundraising and the other in social sciences, then analyzed the created donor biographies and determined primary and secondary donor motivations. The experts then came together to analyze the biographies once more in order to reach consensus regarding donor motivations. Study findings indicated that 60% of mega-gift donors were motivated to give in order to repay the benefit they had already received from the institution (Worth et al., 2020). Other motivations included altruism based on

moral principles and values, desire to advance a specific cause, desire to advance a specific organization, altruism based on empathy, creation of a legacy, and desire to impact a specific community (Worth et al., 2020). These donors, while characterized as *mega-gift donors* had similar motivations to donors who gave lesser amounts to institutions of higher education.

### **Alumni Giving in Higher Education**

Alumni are often donors who are directly solicited for annual fund giving in higher education. Previous research dedicated to alumni giving in higher education indicates that support stems from altruistic motivations. According to Gottfried and Johnson (2006), alumni of higher education are a unique type of consumer because they receive their service in the form of academic funding prior to making the payment for that service in terms of donation back to the institution. Administrators do not often consider alumni to be consumers, so this is an interesting point to consider when examining the role of alumni donations as compared to foundation or corporate donors. Moreover, it highlights the difference in experience that alumni of a college or university have as compared to other stakeholders.

Gottfried and Johnson (2006) examined the relationship between alumni solicitation efforts and alumni donations in higher education. The researchers constructed a longitudinal data set that examined 2,986 schools over a period of 11 years to determine if an increase in solicitation efforts focused on alumni of the institution would increase the number of alumni donors who gave back to the institution. Economic analysis suggested that a higher number of solicitation efforts not only increased the number of alumni who gave back to the institution, but also generated an increased dollar amount from alumni donor gifts (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006). Researchers suggested that future research should focus on conducting cost benefit analysis on

solicitation efforts posed to different subgroups of institutional alumni donors to determine if solicitation efforts resulted in any monetary benefit for the institution.

The behaviors that are displayed by undergraduate students while enrolled in college are often indicators of behaviors that they will display upon graduation. Weerts and Cabrera (2018) suggested that civic and prosocial behaviors, as displayed through group involvement while enrolled as an undergraduate student in college, were predictors of philanthropic behaviors as alumni. The researchers developed a qualitative survey based of focus group feedback and distributed to 2,400 alumni of a public research institution in the United States (Weerts & Cabrera, 2018). There was a response rate of 60% among participants (Weerts & Cabrera, 2018). Based on responses, the researchers groups alumni into four distinct groups based on their involvement in undergraduate activities. The groups identified in this study were residence hall leaders, off-campus student government leaders, volunteers, and disengaged students (Weerts & Cabrera, 2018). Survey results suggested that alumni who were sorted into volunteers and off-campus student government leaders likely held the belief that their alma mater needed their support and would therefore donate upon graduation (Weerts & Cabrera, 2018). Organizational affiliation could be a motivating factor for staff in alumni offices to consider; therefore, it may be beneficial for staff to connect with professionals in student affairs offices prior to raduation to gain insight into levels of student involvement.

Using data from the College and Beyond survey, Clotfelter (2003) examined the undergraduate experiences of donors. The College and Beyond survey collected data from three different cohorts of students from 34 different colleges and universities in the years 1951, 1976, and 1989 (Clotfelter, 2003). The groups that were the focus of this study completed surveys in 1951 and 1976. In the years 1995 and 1996, graduated students were invited to complete

additional surveys that asked them to reflect on their college experience and discuss their current situation in life including items such as marital status and household income (Clotfelter, 2003). Of the original 34 colleges and universities that had student participation, 20 of these institutions were private.

Clotfelter (2003) requested information on alumni giving records from the administrative offices of the private institutions and received responses containing data from 14 of these institutions. This resulted in data from both the College and Beyond survey and data from institutions on each individual's giving behavior. A regression analysis indicated that factors that led to alumni giving included an individual's opinion of their alma mater and their current household income (Clotfelter, 2003). Similar to previous studies, past student experiences while attending college was an important factor that connected with their motivation to give back later in life.

The transition from an enrolled student to an alumnus of an institution comes with new opportunities for giving. McDearmon (2013) conducted a qualitative study using the alumni association of a public research university in the Midwestern United States. There was a 13% response rate from 8,987 alumni who received the survey electronically (McDearmon, 2013). The survey instrument was modified from the original instrument which assessed role identities of participants, expectations, and supportive behaviors of alumni (McDearmon, 2013). Modifications included examples of behaviors that would have been common for alumni at the setting of the study such as attendance of athletic events and volunteering at alumni association events.

Study results indicated that alumni in the research study sample integrated the role of being an alumnus into their personal identity. Additionally, alumni with an increased role

identity with their institution were more likely to support the institution through various behaviors such as donating, volunteering, and attending events on campus. This finding suggests the importance of alumni connections to the college or university, which could lead to an increased sense of shared identity with the institution and ultimately result in behaviors desired by the institution. Miller (2010) stated, “[t]here are alumni and parents who have lasting impressions of good work and special support from student affairs staff members, and those impressions can be converted into generosity of time or of resources...” (p. 73). Additionally, these partnerships grant advancement staff insight into the student experience while the student is still enrolled. Data from Sun et al. (2007) further support these findings. The authors suggested that the student experience significantly influenced alumni donations upon graduation, especially if the individual perceived the institution to have contributed to their educational experience and later to their career trajectory.

Alumni donations are influenced by a variety of factors that could contribute to a college or university successfully receiving donations from an alumnus of the institution. McDearmon and Shirley (2009) administered an online survey of 2,273 young alumni of a large, public, Midwestern university which assessed factors that may influence alumni donations to the university (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Study results of this quantitative research suggested that being an in-state student, having a positive collegiate experience, and donating to other charitable organizations were all predictors of young alumni giving back to their alma mater (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Additionally, alumni who were members of a dues paying alumni association were also more likely to give back to their alma mater than those who are not members (Newman, 2011).

Newman (2011) conducted a quantitative study at a large, public university in the southern United States. The researcher used a Chi-square test of association to examine the relationship between dues paying alumni association members and alumni giving to the university. Individuals who were current members of the alumni association were 4.8 times more likely to philanthropically give to the institution than individuals who were not members of the alumni association (Newman, 2011).

Monks (2002) specifically studied the giving patterns of young alumni of institutions of higher education. In this study, the author collected data from a survey that was distributed to a class of graduates from 1989 (Monks, 2002). The survey collected demographic information, satisfaction with their experience at their alma mater, what they were involved in while enrolled as an undergraduate, and their current participation in activities (Monks, 2002). Survey responses were collected from 10,511 individuals (Monks, 2002). Results from a regression analysis indicated that the amount of money donated by an individual increased as household income increased. The experience that a young alumnus of the institution had while in college was the most significant factor related to alumni giving patterns. Alumni who reported that they were “very satisfied” with their undergraduate experience were 2.6 time more likely to donate than their fellow alumni (Monks, 2002). These results are consistent with previous research and indicate that the undergraduate experience is an important factor in determining whether or not an alumnus will donate to their alma mater.

The giving pattern of a donor may change throughout the course of their life post-graduation. Bristol (1990) examined a sample of over 73,000 philanthropic gifts that were given between the years of 1976 and 1985 at the University of New Hampshire (Bristol, 1990). The percentage of graduating classes that donated to the institution during this time period increased

from 4% of a graduating class their first year after graduation to 51% of a graduating class on their 40th year after graduation (Bristol, 1990). Additionally, the average size of the gift to the university also increased proportionally to the number of years they been out of college. In this case, the average gift grew from \$21 during a graduate's fourth year after graduating from college to \$493 during a graduate's 50th year after graduating (Bristol, 1990). In addition to an increase in the number of individuals in a graduating class who choose to donate as they become further removed from their graduation year, there were upward spikes during certain years in an individual's life. These spikes occurred at ages 25, 40, and 50 years old (Bristol, 1990). According to Bristol (1990), a spike at the age of 50 represented the peak of a donor's giving experience at the university, as the pattern of giving tended to decline after this point in the donor's life. The researcher noted that the alumni office at this institution made specific efforts during these years to encourage alumni to be more involved by inviting them to return to campus for events. In addition to these upward spikes, reunion years for graduating cohorts showed an increase in giving behaviors.

Reunion years often encourage individuals to donate, especially among individuals who are not typically as engaged with the institution. Furthermore, the researcher noted that these donors would essentially disappear in the years immediately after a reunion year and not donate again for a number of years. While upward spikes occurred in the years after an individual graduated from college, there was a decline in donations from individuals at certain points after graduation. Around 40 years after a cohort of students has graduated from the institution, the institution will begin to see a rise in this group's retirement and mortality rates. Both of these factors often result in a decline in giving behaviors. These giving patterns can assist offices of advancement in predicting gifts from alumni donors each year.

Alumni donors may not always be consistent in their giving. Wunnava and Lauze (2001) focused on investigating the differences between alumni who consistently give to their alma mater and those who do not give on a consistent basis. This longitudinal study took place over a 23-year period and included data from 1,095 donors who gave to the institution on an annual basis (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). This study took place at Middlebury College, in Middlebury Vermont. Middlebury College is considered to be a small, private liberal arts college. The authors also collected data for alumni donors who gave occasionally to the college. This sample consisted of 7,511 alumni who gave to Middlebury College sporadically over the period of 23 years (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). Donors who were consistent in their giving patterns to the college gave more to the college on average as compared to occasional donors (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). The researchers reported no statistical difference in the number of gifts to the college based on gender. Donations were found to increase the year before a donors' reunion year. The authors noted that reunion years were often the years that occasional donors chose to give to their alma mater. Other factors that were important to the consistency of alumni donations were alumnus involvement through volunteering for the college, academic major in the social sciences, attendance of the language school, employment in careers related to finance, and donation among alumnus who lived in states with alumni association chapters (Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). Longitudinal data are important for offices of advancement because these data can predict a donor's pattern of giving.

Taylor and Martin (1995) examined the differences in giving behaviors of alumni and non-alumni from a large, public research institution. The researchers selected a random sample of individuals representing both donors and non-donors from the overall population of 37,691 alumni of this institution. This sample included 250 donors and 250 non-donors for a total of 500

participants. These individuals completed a survey which asked 32 items including demographics, attitudes, collegiate involvement, and philanthropic characteristics of individuals (Taylor & Martin, 1995). A discriminant analysis identified several variables that demonstrated discriminating powers between the donor and non-donor groups. Variables included the perception of need for financial support, household income, enrollment in additional graduate work, the reading of alumni publications, special-interest group involvement, and involvement with the college/university as an alumnus (Taylor & Martin, 1995). Of those individuals that donated to the college/university, 61% reported that they perceived a financial need from the institution (Taylor & Martin, 1995). Similar to prior studies, study results indicated that alumni who were involved in activities as undergraduate students were more likely to give upon graduation. Additionally, alumni who continued to be involved with the college/university in some capacity upon graduation were also more likely to be donors to the institution.

Alumni who were non-donors were also influenced by a similar set of factors. Watsyn (2009) found that alumni non-donors shared many demographic characteristics with alumni donors. In this study, 12 non-donors of a mid-sized, religiously affiliated regional university agreed to participate in in-person interviews. Shared characteristics of non-donors consisted of positive feelings about their alma mater, positive collegiate experiences, and continued engagement with their alma mater upon graduation (Watsyn, 2009). However, results indicated that these individuals perceived their experiences differently than alumni who chose to give back to their alma mater.

Watsyn (2009) identified four major themes from interviews: the college not needing the money from the donor; that college is a commodity, they are uncertain about giving; and they do not make their giving decisions logically. Shared characteristics between donors and non-donors

may make it difficult for advancement staff to identify individuals who would be more likely to donate. Using the conceptual framework of Van Slyke and Brooks model on the giving process, the researcher suggested that differences between alumni becoming donors and alumni becoming non-donors were based on their perception of the message delivered at the time of donation solicitation (Watsyn, 2009). Moreover, the model suggested that background factors, such as demographic characteristics, combined to create motivations that were activated by some sort of trigger, such as a donation solicitation, resulting in the action of giving back philanthropically to the organization (Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005). This finding proposes that advancement offices must be aware of the messages they are sending with college communication in terms of donation solicitation. Some messages do not resonate with all donors based on their individual experiences as enrolled students.

Solicitation efforts have a positive effect on the amount of money that alumni donors give each year (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006). This is to be expected and why many initiatives in offices for advancement are focused on asking donors directly for monetary gifts. However, the results of a quantitative research study indicated that the number of communication materials sent to alumni did not appear to affect their participation in giving back to their alma mater nor the amount of their donation (Levine, 2008). In this research study, 250 surveys were distributed to advancement officers at private colleges in the United States who were also members of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. The goal of the study was to determine if there was a correlation between annual giving and the level of communication used by the institution. Results suggested that the sheer number of magazines, newsletters, or written cards sent to alumni neither prompted a higher dollar amount of donations nor increased the number of alumni who decided to donate.

In addition to communicating educational material, the general communication between colleges and universities and their stakeholders is of importance. Sun et al. (2007) suggested that creating a comprehensive communications strategy through collaboration with other on-campus offices had the potential to increase alumni donations to the college/university. In this quantitative study, the researchers applied a multivariate causal model to survey results from two-year's worth of alumni satisfaction surveys to investigate the effects of student experience, alumni experience, alumni motivation, and demographic variables on alumni giving. This study population was comprised of 175,000 alumni from a Midwestern university, and the response rates were 24% and 18%, respectively for the two years the survey was distributed (Sun et al., 2007).

In a quantitative study, Levine (2008) analyzed communication between alumni donors and the college/university. Survey results indicated that the number of materials distributed to this group did not prompt additional donations. While the overall number of communication materials sent to alumni did not prompt additional donations, there were specific materials associated with more frequent gifts from alumni. As new technologies become available, the ways in which information is communicated to donors have also begun to change (e.g., e-newsletters) (Levine, 2008). Other forms of communication efforts include materials such as annual reports, catalogs, newsletters, alumni magazines, invitations, and press releases (Levine, 2008). Study findings suggested that more targeted communications were positively related to the number of financial gifts that were received from alumni donors.

While solicitation of gifts is important for any charitable organization, research by Le Blanc and Rucks (2008) suggested that in higher education a small percentage of alumni comprise a large portion of the major gifts donated to the college. Based on 33,000 donor records

at a large, public university, the researchers used cluster analysis to sort individuals into six groups based on the average amount the alumni gave to the foundation and the alumni association. The group that averaged the highest donation to the gift foundation consisted of eight cases, and the group that averaged the highest donation to the alumni association consisted of 39 cases (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2008). These two groups averaged the highest amounts of donations back to the college while the number of cases totaled 47 of the 33,000 examined cases.

### **Philanthropic Strategies for Affiliate Groups in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education serve a diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other demographic characteristics. These diverse student populations will ultimately transition into diverse alumni and general workforce populations. Previous researchers have noted challenges associated with affiliate groups giving to institutions of higher education. In order to overcome these challenges, researchers have focused on diversity in terms of donors as well as specific tactics that colleges and universities should use when they solicit from these populations.

Tsunoda (2010) described qualitative interviews with advancement officers; findings suggested that development offices often did not have specific plans to target philanthropic giving from Asian American donors. The research explored three case studies at large institutions characterized by their high enrollment levels of Asian American students as compared to other ethnic groups. Study participants who worked in the advancement offices noted the importance of diversity in the various fundraising techniques that the university may employ. Additionally, the advancement officers noted in their interviews that there was a lack of participation from Asian American alumni in the programming offered to alumni. Instead, they chose to participate in activities with their own communities.

In a paper presentation by Mone (2017), the author noted the lack of specific strategies to target parents of Asian students to donate to their child's college/university. In this qualitative study, interviews were conducted with 10 parent donors of students who attended a private university in California. Interviews with study participants revealed three themes: the concept of *guanxi* plays an important role, other Chinese parents are not donating for a reason, and the college should employ more specific strategies in order to gain more Chinese parent donors. Mone (2017) suggested incorporating the traditionally Chinese concept of *guanxi* into advancement practices in order to create relationships with this underutilized group of donors. This approach is "synonymous with relationship, connection or network" (Mone, 2017, p. 2). An approach such as this aligns with other strategies in advancement offices that focus on relationship building between the college or university and its donors.

Garvey and Drezner (2019) found that giving behaviors of LGBTQ alumnux were influenced by undergraduate student experiences. Using snowball sampling through campus administrators, the authors identified a sample of 2,290 participants who identified as members of the LGBTQ community (Garvey & Drezner, 2019). Participants completed *The National LGBT Alumni Survey* electronically for the purpose of this study. The researchers used a two-step hierarchical logistic regression analysis to analyze the results of the survey. Results indicated that academic involvement, co-curricular involvement, demographics, and finances explained variance in LGBTQ lifetime giving behaviors (Garvey & Drezner, 2019). Additionally, the researchers reported that a positive perception of the campus climate towards LGBTQ individuals positively affected the probability of those individuals donating to the institution as an alumnux (Garvey & Drezner, 2019). While individual income was also a strong predictor of alumnux donations upon graduation, it is significant to note the importance of

undergraduate experience for this sample of alumnux (Garvey & Drezner, 2019). The authors concluded that this population of donors would benefit from fundraising strategies that are targeted to their community in order to engage individuals in a more direct and meaningful way.

According to Tindall and Waters (2010), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have long struggled with gaining financial support, which shows the important role that advancement offices can play for these colleges and universities. Tindall and Waters (2010) surveyed fundraising staff at 87 HBCUs to examine the communication styles and outreach program that were most often employed. In this quantitative study, both public and private institution staff were surveyed. Tindall and Waters (2010) identified the most common fundraising approach used at HBCUs as the press-agentry approach, which creates campaigns centered on emotions. This approach is categorized as an approach that uses emotional manipulation to pressure individuals to donate (Tindall & Waters, 2010).

Hunter et al. (1999) conducted a mixed methods study to examine the relationship between alumni giving and characteristics such as demographics, undergraduate experiences, present circumstances, and current alumni involvement at the HBCU Livingstone College. The first stage of this research study was a mailed survey distributed to 1,300 alumni of the institution. This survey was designed to gather data on characteristics of alumni who had donated during a period of six years, from 1990 to 1996 (Hunter et al., 1999). This stage was followed by interviews conducted with alumni who had donated at least \$10,000 to the institution during the aforementioned period of time as well as interviews conducted with directors of alumni affairs at peer institutions to Livingstone College (Hunter et al., 1999).

The qualitative interview portion of this research offered practical suggestions for increased donor engagement for those in advancement positions at institutions with similar

characteristics to Livingstone College. Alumni donors suggested that more gifts could be cultivated if the alumni office made personal connections and intentionally contacted donors about giving opportunities. Additional comments recommended an expansion of the board of trustees, showcasing alumni who had donated to the college, and opening more alumni programs and chapters, all of which would potentially increase donor engagement (Hunter et al., 1999). Research findings suggest that intentionality is of importance to alumni donors of HBCUs and that more opportunities to be involved with the alma mater could encourage a higher level of alumni involvement and giving.

In a historiographic essay, Freeman (2010) noted a misconception in philanthropic giving that the author attributed to challenges that HBCUs face in their advancement offices. Freeman (2010) stated, “African Americans have a history of being donors and fundraisers and not just recipients of other peoples’ philanthropy” (p. 160). Consistent with this misconception, Cohen (2006) noted that many HBCUs have ceased trying to solicit funds from alumni and instead focused their philanthropic initiatives on corporate gifts. In this quantitative study, Cohen (2006) mailed 1,000 questionnaires to alumni of four HBCUs, and recorded responses of 120 alumni. Research such as this suggests that advancement offices must develop specific strategies to target these alumni.

Leak and Reid (2010) further suggested that advancement offices could begin modeling development strategies at HBCUs after Black churches in order to “instill a sense of social responsibility and community connection” in students in order to build their alumni giving base (p. 243). Leak and Reid (2010) examined the Atlanta University studies which consisted of a compilation of a series of conferences and 24 papers, which the HBCU Atlanta University produced between 1896 and 1947 (p. 238). The authors used these data in combination with

historic newspaper accounts to describe the support that higher education received from Black churches.

Prior research also notes specific strategies used in advancement offices for religious affiliation groups. A longitudinal study by Bongila (2010) noted the successful use of press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric advancement communication strategies at Catholic universities in the United States. The author used both quantitative and qualitative methods of surveys and face-to-face interviews with advancement professionals at Catholic affiliated colleges to study different models of communication used by advancement offices. While certain strategies were utilized more than others, this is one example of a strategic philanthropic initiative being used in higher education to target an affiliate group. Bongila (2010) noted that two-way advancement models were used most frequently at Catholic universities in the study; however, the two-way symmetric strategy was the preferred method of communication strategies in offices for advancement (Bongila, 2010). The two-way symmetric strategy method was developed in the 1980s and calls for “mutual understanding between the organization and its publics rather than persuasion” (Bongila, 2010, p. 201). Methods such as these call for clear communication between higher education and donors who are solicited for gifts to the college or university.

As this research indicates, higher education administrators must be conscious of the differences in populations from whom they solicit donations during philanthropic initiatives. Many colleges and universities did not utilize strategies specific to affiliate groups which resulted in underutilized groups of potential donors. Those colleges and universities that did utilize a specific model tended to have greater success in their advancement offices. Determining which strategies resonate with donors is an important aspect of fundraising.

Another evolving element of fundraising is that of community college fundraising. Typically funded by state money and tuition from students, community colleges have historically had less of a focus on fundraising campaigns (Carter, 2011). In a descriptive study, Carter and Duggan (2010) surveyed donors to analyze the motivations of current, past, and major gift donors to community colleges. The researchers mailed surveys to 2,865 donors, with responses from 385 current donors, 2,448 past donors, and 32 major gift donors (Carter & Duggan, 2010). Survey questions were influenced by donor profiles as previously described by Prince and File (1994). In each category, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were Communitarians, which is consistent with findings by Prince and File (1994). Specifically, Communitarians comprised the largest percentage of donors. Prince and File (2001) described Communitarians as those who give back to the community in which they live because of the advantages that they have received from their community.

Student philanthropy initiatives are a common form of fundraising on many college campuses. Pottick et al. (2015) examined a student-led philanthropy initiative for scholarships in a social work program which instilled a sense of philanthropy in students while in school. This sense of philanthropy led to the average gift from a student who participated in the program giving three times more than their peers one year post graduation. This case study analyzed the results of a student-led philanthropy campaign in the school of social work. Over a period of three years, a student committee encouraged their peers to donate the dollar amount of their graduation year (e.g., \$20.13 for the graduation year of 2013). The percentage of students in the program that donated to this student-led initiative grew each year. Student-led programs such as suggest that partnerships with Student Affairs professionals could be beneficial to college advancement strategies.

## **Advancement Staff**

The role of a staff member in an advancement office has changed over time. Skinner (2019) conducted document analysis to describe the evolution of fundraising practices in offices for institutional advancement in higher education in the United States. The research focused on four components often found in advancement offices: alumni relations, public relations or communications, development or fundraising, and government relations (Skinner, 2019). Overall findings suggested that the field of advancement is growing in importance at American institutions of higher education. Articles in the analysis often focused on the increased need for advancement offices at institutions of higher education (Skinner, 2019). Skinner (2019) also described the theme of the rising importance of private fundraising. Themes such as these aid in describing the continuing importance and need for professional development staff at colleges and universities.

Document analysis findings also highlighted the need of advancement offices to more effectively communicate to the public, which ultimately has the potential to improve relationships between the surrounding community and institutions of higher education (Skinner, 2019). While communication between the institution and the public is important, Levine (2008) noted that many communications departments at colleges and universities did not report directly to the office for advancement. The movement of communications offices to report to other entities in the organizational structure of higher education highlights yet another change in the structure of institutional advancement offices. This findings calls for advancement staff members to be diligent when working across departments to ensure that messages are communicated effectively.

Watsyn (2009) suggested that using different narratives in distributed alumni communication materials may be able to reach alumni who have not donated in the past. Additionally, Primer (2009) noted that continued communication throughout the philanthropic solicitation process was important when cultivating donors in order to ensure they felt appreciated. Communication between an institution of higher education and its donors is a common component of fundraising efforts. These communication efforts can include educational materials that assist donors in becoming more familiar with the various philanthropic gift strategies that are available to them (Prince & File, 1994).

In addition to the role of the advancement profession in higher education changing over time, the pathway to attain this career path has also varied for many advancement professionals. A final sample of 44 participants were recruited from an initial sample of 2,234 individuals who were contacted to complete a survey regarding their professional fundraising experiences at institutions of higher education (Farwell et al., 2019). Participants indicated that they would be willing to share more information about their experiences in fundraising and were asked to participate in researcher-led interviews. Farwell et al. (2019) used a semi-structured interview style to ask participants to describe their career trajectory, especially regarding how they entered the field of advancement in higher education.

Approximately one-third of participants expressed that they did not originally intend to go into the field of advancement in higher education and used the phrase *falling into* to describe how they secured their job (Farwell et al., 2019). While the entrance to the field of advancement in higher education was described as accidental, the motivation of many interview participants to remain in the field was the passion they felt for their work. Half of interview participants described their work as *meaningful* (Farwell et al., 2019). These findings suggest that while

higher education advancement may not have been the original career plan for many individuals in the field, they found the work to be meaningful, which may encourage professionals to continue in the field. Since the career plan for many of these individuals was not a direct one, there is a potential lack of formal training prior to entering the profession. However, some skills that are beneficial in the career of advancement can be developed through professional development training.

Kay-Williams (2000) used qualitative research to develop five stages of fundraising. In this study, Kay-Williams (2000) distributed a questionnaire in-person to an individual responsible for 30 charitable organizations. Through data analysis, the researcher determined that there was not one common or consistent method of fundraising across all participating organizations. The author placed the stages of fundraising into three distinct phases Kay-Williams (2000) identified the five stages as: 1. The passionate appeal, 2. We need more money, 3. We need some help, 4. Leave it to us, and 5. Let's all work on this together (p. 227). Kay-Williams (2000) named the three distinct phases the appeal phase, the fundraising phase, and the marketing phase. While these five stages describe the lifecycle of fundraising at a charitable organization, the author noted that there were no reliable indicators to indicate which stage of the process that an organization was currently in (Kay-Williams, 2000).

Creating relationships with donors is an important component of a fundraising professional's career. Harrison (2018) suggested that stewardship strategies used in fundraising departments of higher education increased the value of the experience for donors at different levels of giving, including: annual giving; major giving, including an endowment; and major giving, including multiple endowments (Harrison, 2018). In public relations, stewardship uses communication strategies to strengthen the relationship between an organization and its donors

(Harrison, 2018). In this quantitative study, Harrison (2018) distributed an online survey to donors who met the criteria of the different levels of giving at a large research university in the northeastern United States. Surveys yielded 1,709 responses from donors (Harrison, 2018). Consistent with the researcher's hypothesis, stewardship strategies were ranked of higher importance by major donors with multiple endowments as compared to major donors with one endowment or annual gift donors (Harrison, 2018). All groups indicated that stewardship strategies were of importance. Research findings suggest that as a donor becomes more familiar with an institution, in terms of the amounts of their gifts or the number of endowments they have, the relationship that is facilitated using stewardship strategies becomes increasingly important. This finding should encourage staff in advancement offices to cultivate relationships with donors on an ongoing basis. While the initial relationship is important, the relationship does not end with the donation to the organization.

Building relationships with donors is a key aspect of an advancement staff member's career. The cultivation of relationships between a college/university and a donor is frequently time consuming which makes consistency of staff members an important factor in the success of fundraising efforts (Iarrobino, 2006). Since efforts to build relationships with donors is time consuming, it is cost effective for a college/university to hire and train someone who will be employed at the institution for a long period of time. Iarrobino (2006) studied employment turnover in the advancement profession by examining survey data obtained from 10 advancement professionals employed at small northeastern colleges. In these surveys, nine of the 10 vice presidents for advancement stated that they did not think they had complete control over their personnel budget and personnel decision making. Vice presidents further explained that there were other stakeholders involved in the decision-making processes at colleges and

universities. Relationships with these stakeholders were important when building a staff, especially if the hiring and budget decisions did not reside solely with the vice president of advancement.

Individuals who are employed in advancement and development offices often have skills that allow them to reach a large community of donors for annual giving and other campaigns throughout the year. Nyman et al. (2018) suggested staffs that cultivate large, principal gifts have additional expertise in fundraising techniques including networking, negotiating, and knowledge of asset management. Nyman et al. (2018) categorized these skills as the networker, the negotiator, and the knowledge broker. Ideally, advancement staffs were able to demonstrate expertise in all three of the aforementioned areas at the same time in order to be successful in obtaining a large gift from a donor. In this qualitative study, Nyman et al. (2018) obtained a sample of 30 principle-gift fundraisers through snowball sampling, and scheduled semi-structured interviews via telephone with study participants (Nyman et al., 2018).

The researchers conducted interviews using a life-story approach, which asked participants to tell the stories of instances in which they were able to secure a large, transformational gift for the higher education institution at which they were employed. Through these interviews, the roles of the networker, negotiator, and knowledge broker were associated with key fundraising activities (Nyman et al., 2018). The role of the networker was to build relationships with the donor and other individuals who were close to the donor, such as family and friends. The negotiator acted as the visionary of the organization and created goals with the intentions of the donor in mind. Finally, the knowledge broker had knowledge of tax laws and helped the donor to monitor their assets (Nyman et al., 2018). This research highlights the

importance of staff training, especially for advancement positions that may call for the cultivation of large donations.

The importance of relationships between professional staff and alumni can also be seen through the construction of a collegiate brand community. These types of relationships are dependent upon professional staff in the advancement office to make connections with alumni as well as other departments at the college/university. McAlexander et al. (2006) stated, “Efforts toward building community, such as sponsoring events, offering student life related activities, facilitating interaction with faculty, and establishing brand identity with current students, offer the potential of enduring alumni loyalty” (p. 117). In this empirical study, the researchers applied the emerging theory of the brand community construct to the field of higher education. Brand community is described as relationships that connect customers to a brand which results in a connection to the institution and other customers affiliated with the institution. Researchers sent surveys to alumni of a western university who had graduated in the past three to 10 years. Of the surveys distributed, 497 completed surveys were returned. Survey items used a Likert-type scale which measured alumni relationships with the product, the brand, the institution, and other institutional alumni. The results of the survey indicated that brand community contributed to donations to the college, college referrals, engagement in other alumni groups, and participation in continuing education at the university.

Advancement offices in higher education have costs associated with their operation. In fact, Harrison et al. (1995) suggested that advancement offices that spent more on development generated significantly more donations than offices that spent less on development. Harrison et al. (1995) obtained data on expenditures in development offices from the collegiate responses of 18 colleges and universities in the United States to a survey distributed by The Council for

Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). Expenditures in development offices consist of: events for alumni, promotional aspects of reunions and clubs, travel, and various alumni recognition programs. Survey results indicated that institutional development offices that spent more money on programming for alumni saw an increase in the amount of donations they received (Harrison et al., 1995). This finding indicated that many alumni enjoyed receiving some sort of benefit in return for their donation to an organization.

The current literature on higher education advancement offices and fundraising efforts focuses on types of donors, donor motivations, general alumni donations to their alma mater, philanthropic strategies used to solicit donations from affiliate groups in higher education, and characteristics of advancement staff. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding planned giving. Planned giving is a form of giving in which a small number of donors participate, especially at institutions with lower enrollment numbers, because they produce fewer alumni than larger colleges and universities. Planned gifts offer alumni a unique way to give back to their alma mater. The motivations for this type of giving are likely unique to this group of donors. By clarifying what these donors experience, important insights can be gained regarding the cultivation of these donor-institution relationships.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used social identity theory to influence the formation of my interview questions and data analysis process. Social identity theory describes how an individual's perception of their membership in various organizations affects their behavior (Tajfel, 1979). According to Stets and Burke (2000), "Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective" (p. 226). Additionally, Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggested that individuals classify themselves into groups in order to

give themselves a sense of order in their social environment. Individuals identify themselves as part of a group and strive to make sure their behaviors align with the behaviors they believe their group possesses.

Social identity theory also builds upon the idea of social comparison of oneself to others. The theory suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain a positive self-image over a negative self-image (Stephenson & Bell, 2014; Tajfel, 1979). This aspect of social identity theory helped me develop the research questions for this study. Motivation is a central theme of this study, and the motivation to donate could be related to the motivation of a donor to maintain a positive self-image. This concept of social comparison allows those who perceive themselves to be part of a certain group to compare themselves to those who they perceive to be a part of an outside or other group.

I analyzed planned giving participation by viewing the membership component as connected in some capacity to the institution through planned giving and the behavior of interest as the motivating factor to donate through planned giving. I was specifically interested in the motivation piece that occurs in order to spark the behavior of planned giving. Social identity theory suggests that individuals share an identity with the group to which they perceive themselves as belonging (Tajfel, 1979). If an individual has a positive experience with the institution overall, or with a specific group they connect to their collegiate experience (e.g., social group, athletic team, academic organization), or with the religious denomination with which the institution is affiliated, the fundraising efforts of the advancement office would focus on those aspects of the experience in order to motivate the individual to donate. Overall, if an individual is invested in the institution, in theory, they may be more likely to give back to the college/university in terms of monetary gifts. This is especially true if they believe that the

monetary gift will benefit the institution to which they perceive themselves to be a member. For the purpose of this study, I investigated the types of experiences that planned gift donors recalled as being influential in their decision to give. Experiences could likely be tied to their membership in a social group or category that the donor was a part of while in college. Not all planned gift donors were alumni of the institution. If the planned gift donor was not an alumnus of the college, the perception of the individual's membership as a family member of an alumni or community member could also suggest motivations of giving philanthropically.

I also used social identity theory to develop interview questions with planned gift donors and to analyze the interview transcripts in order to organize and interpret the data. I asked donors questions about their introduction to Southeastern College, as an alumnus or another experience in their life. I also asked questions about the individuals whom the donor perceived as influential in their decision to become a planned gift donor. I focused on the similarities in experiences that the donors described, which suggested a shared experience and perception of a shared group membership among donors. When analyzing stories from interviews with planned donors, I focused on the process that donors went through before they made the decision to make a planned gift to the college.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### **Introduction**

Philanthropic giving is an important source of revenue for institutions of higher education. I conducted a qualitative study using a descriptive research perspective. Descriptive qualitative research approaches include detailed descriptions of both people and places in order to tell the story (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a descriptive qualitative approach as one that is “[i]ntended to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon or the relationships between events and phenomena” (p. 5). In order to maintain the confidentiality of both the college and the planned gift donors who agreed to be research participants, all names in this research study, including the name of the college, are pseudonyms.

Planned giving is a specific form of philanthropic giving, and at small colleges this form of giving is a rarity in terms of overall giving. Descriptive qualitative research was the best approach for this study because planned giving donors had experience giving back philanthropically in a way that differs from other donors. By speaking with donors who give in this capacity, I was able to hear stories from participants in which they described their individual experiences and motivations to give back through planned giving. Descriptions of both the donors and their motivations to give a planned gift were best described with thorough details regarding characteristics of the institution, each donor’s background, and the people involved in

the giving process. Additionally, the relationship between the motivation to give a planned gift and the action of giving in this way was best reported using a descriptive qualitative approach.

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to gain insight into the motivations of donors when choosing to participate in planned giving philanthropy initiatives. The study specifically focused on the motivations of donors at a small private institution who participated in less common philanthropic initiatives, such as planned giving. A study focused on this population and topic will add to the literature that is available on fundraising techniques in the field of higher education.

The research methods section for this study begins with the research question and sub-questions to further expand upon donor motivations and descriptions of experiences that donors perceived as important to their decision-making process when choosing to participate in planned giving. Next, I provide a description of the site selection and participant selection for the research study, including the rationale for each, followed by a discussion of the choice of methodology. The next section is a description of the data collection and data analysis processes. The final section includes a statement of the limitations, a position statement by the author, an overview of ethical considerations, and a statement of quality assurance.

### **Research Questions**

I analyzed the main research question of what motivates donors to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving. Of particular interest were the various motivations that donors to colleges and universities had when it came to giving to the institution, specifically small institutions of higher education. In order to gain further insight on the topic of donor motivations, I also analyzed the following questions:

(1) What motivates donors to participate in planned giving philanthropic initiatives at small colleges?

(2) What are specific experiences that donors describe as important to their decision to make a planned gift?

### **Site Selection and Rationale**

Southeastern College is a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts college located in the southeastern United States. The college is located in a residential neighborhood environment. The city is home to several other higher education institutions. The college is considered to be a primarily White institution (PWI). Southeastern College is a four-year, liberal arts college that offers a variety of degree majors and minors. Each academic program is accredited. The College currently offers both Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Southeastern College currently has fewer than 1,000 traditional undergraduate students enrolled. The majority of undergraduate students live on campus. Students enrolled at Southeastern College are primarily residents of the state. The College is religiously affiliated and requires students to enroll in religion courses in order to complete the general core curriculum.

There are fewer than 300 full-time employees at Southeastern College, including fewer than 100 faculty members employed by the College; the majority of these faculty members hold the highest degree in their field. The faculty ethnic diversity is similar to that of the student body. The majority of faculty is on the tenure track.

### **Selection Rationale**

Planned giving has the potential to create significant change at a nonprofit organization in a way that a traditional cash gift cannot. I selected this institution as the site of my research study because the institution has benefited directly from gifts provided through planned giving.

Southeastern College has cultivated planned gifts from donors but does not have an office dedicated to soliciting planned gifts. This site allowed me to explore the motivations of donors who participated in fundraising initiatives in the form of planned giving.

According to a report on the 2019 Survey of College and University Presidents, three-quarters of college and university presidents expressed the belief that wealthy, elite institutions received a disproportionate amount of large philanthropic gifts, and that smaller, non-elite institutions would benefit more from gifts of this substantial size (Jaschik & Lederman 2019). Small, private institutions are dependent upon tuition from their enrolled students to generate a large portion of their operating budgets each year. This model does not allow the college to assume many projects that are outside of the operating budget parameters. Each year, the amount of tuition discounts that institutions offer in order to keep their student enrollment number consistent with the budget goals grows, and this trend is likely to continue to increase. Smaller institutions have fewer financial resources which is why the motivations of these donors to participate in planned giving are of significance.

### **Participant Selection and Rationale**

A profile of a planned gift donor can be deduced from the results of previous research on donors. A donor is likely to be familiar with the institution or organization to which they are giving money (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001). Planned gift donors are likely to be older individuals. Research indicates that donors over the age of 75 years old donate, on average, a higher amount of money than younger donors (Midlarsky & Hannah, 1989). Donors give more to an organization if they do not share financial obligations with another person in their household. This means that a planned gift donor is more likely to have a marital status of single, widowed, or divorced (Andreoni et al., 2003). Alumni are also likely to be donors to an institution,

especially if they live in close proximity to the physical location of the institution (Lara & Johnson, 2014).

Donors are often placed into different categories based on the amount they give annually to the institution, or if they have given a certain amount of money to the college over their lifetime. Donors who choose to participate in planned giving are frequently categorized by the advancement office in a way that signifies that they chose to give in this capacity. These methods of recognizing donors based on their level of giving are helpful when lists are published in financial reports or alumni magazines. Planned giving is a less common way to philanthropically give to an institution or organization. Participants for this study were selected “because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139).

I selected study participants because they experienced the decision-making process and motivations that led them to a decision to give a planned gift to a small institution with low enrollment numbers. For the purpose of this research study, study participants were planned gift donors who had officially communicated with the college of their intentions to participate in planned giving and the college has documentation of this agreement.

I partnered with the Institutional Advancement Office at Southeastern College to contact potential interview participants. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), it is often beneficial to a qualitative researcher to obtain the permission of a gatekeeper at the site of their study. A gatekeeper is an individual with insider access and the ability to aid the researcher in gaining access to the site. The gatekeeper helps the researcher locate people and places to study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I identified the Assistant Vice President of Development Operations as the gatekeeper at the institution. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) also suggested

that gatekeepers may require a submission of written information that explains more about the research study. I submitted my Institutional Review Board approval letter from the University of Alabama, my Institutional Review Board approval letter from Southeastern College, my Informed Consent form, and my interview protocol to the identified gatekeeper along with my request for a list of planned gift donors to the college.

The identified gatekeeper emailed me an Excel spreadsheet of donors that had been labeled by Southeastern College as planned gift donors in their online database. The Excel spreadsheet included the names of donors; contact information in the form of an email address, phone number, or both forms of contact; their status with the college (e.g., alumni, friend of the college, non-graduate); and a note on the nature of their gift. The list provided to me by Southeastern College included the names of 63 individuals. Upon review of the list, I determined that in addition to confirmed planned gift donors, the college's online database also included individuals who had communicated their interest in planned giving but had not provided the college with any official documentation of the planned gift agreement. There were 26 individuals on the Excel spreadsheet who were confirmed as planned gift donors by the institutional gatekeeper.

Nonprobability sampling is often the method of choice for qualitative researchers because the results are not able to be generalized from the sample selected to the greater population. The most common form of nonprobabilistic sampling is purposeful sampling. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the selection of purposeful sampling to be “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 98). This type of purposeful sampling is categorized as unique sampling because it is “based on unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences

of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used total population sampling in order to include as many participants as possible who met the criteria of this research study. This type of sampling is used most often when the population of interest is of a size that is relatively small in order to be easily managed (Crossman, 2020). In this study, the group was small enough to be managed. Additionally, all members of the group shared the key characteristic of being a planned gift donor. By asking all of the planned gift donors at the institution to participate, I was able to enhance my understanding of their motivations to participate in planned giving.

Prior to contacting potential interview participants, all individuals were contacted by an institutional representative of Southeastern College who explained that they would be contacted by a graduate student enrolled at the University of Alabama in the coming days because they were listed as a planned gift donor in the institution’s online donor database. I was then sent confirmation that all potential participants had been contacted by the institutional representative. Next, I contacted all potential interview participants to invite them to participate in an interview that was centered on their donor experience at Southeastern College, and more specifically their experiences with deciding to make a planned gift. I worked with the identified gatekeeper at the institution to determine the likelihood of an individual to check their email. Those who were identified as someone who would likely not check their email, were contacted with a phone call and distributed the same information that I included in the email to potential participants. I suggested potential interview dates and provided interview options of face-to-face interviews, electronic Zoom meetings, and telephone calls. I noted my preference for interviews was the in-person option.

Of the 26 individuals who were identified as planned gift donors by the institution, I was able to successfully contact and schedule interviews with 17 individuals. Of the remaining

potential participants, I was unable to reach four individuals through the contact information I was provided, one denied my request for an interview, and four shared that they had scheduling conflicts that prevented them from being able to participate. I proceeded with the 17 interviews that I was able to schedule and analyzed the data collected from them in order to determine if I had reached data saturation. Participants agreed to participate in interviews lasting between 45 minutes one hour and also completed a brief demographic survey distributed through Qualtrics.

Study participants exhibited demographic characteristics similar to donor characteristics from prior research. Of those interviewed, eight participants fell into the age category of 70 to 79 years of age. All participants self-identified as white/Caucasian. Twelve participants reported living in close proximity to Southeastern College (within a distance of 100 miles). Most of the participants had retired from their careers; however, four were still working full-time jobs. Participants had a high level of formal education with 13 reporting that they had obtained a Master's degree or higher. Table 1 shows the general demographic characteristics of each participant. I used pseudonyms for all of participants in order to protect their identities.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Gender | Age     | Marital Status | Children |
|-------------|--------|---------|----------------|----------|
| Bill        | M      | 70-79   | Single         | No       |
| Alice       | F      | 70-79   | Married        | No       |
| David       | M      | 70-79   | Single         | No       |
| Mary        | F      | 80-89   | Single         | No       |
| Laura       | F      | 70-79   | Married        | Yes      |
| Susan       | F      | 50-59   | Divorced       | No       |
| Mike        | M      | 70-79   | Married        | Yes      |
| Tony        | M      | 80-89   | Married        | Yes      |
| James       | M      | 70-79   | Married        | Yes      |
| Daniel      | M      | 70-79   | Widowed        | Yes      |
| Rachel      | F      | 80-89   | Divorced       | Yes      |
| Steve       | M      | 30-39   | Married        | Yes      |
| Bob         | M      | Over 89 | Widowed        | Yes      |
| Lisa        | F      | 70-79   | Married        | Yes      |
| Joe         | M      | 80-89   | Married        | No       |
| Tom         | M      | 50-59   | Married        | No       |
| Rob         | M      | 50-59   | Married        | No       |

## **Research Design**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers who use a qualitative approach “are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). Through the use of a descriptive research design, I was able offer a summary of specific experiences and motivations of planned giving donors. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) categorized this type of research as basic qualitative research. Basic qualitative research is the most common form of qualitative research design with the goal of finding and interpreting the meaning that research participants assign to their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **Data Collection**

I collected data for this study through interviews with donors who were designated by Southeastern College as planned gift donors. These individuals are those who had officially communicated with the college in some capacity their intentions to donate through planned giving initiatives and provided the college with documentation of this intention. I used a semi-structured questioning style to conduct 15 interviews with 17 individuals for this research study. Two interviews were with married couples which resulted in my final participant number of 17 individuals.

By soliciting the assistance of an institutional gatekeeper and having an institutional representative reach out to participants prior to me contacting them, my hope was that study participants would have a sense of rapport with me as the researcher when I contacted them to schedule the interviews. The prior relationship that Southeastern College had with each donor and their assistance in connecting me with the participants assisted me in building rapport with each individual participant. According to Prince and File (1994), individuals build more natural

relationships and routines over a period of time rather than immediately when making a change. McGrath et al. (2019) suggested that rapport with interviewees should be established prior to the actual interview in order to build trust with the interview participant. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research often occurs in a natural setting in order to make the setting more natural to study participants. The setting of each interview varied in order to aid in building and maintaining rapport with each individual: some were at the donor's home, others were in a conference room on the Southeastern College campus, while others were over Zoom or the telephone. The ability of the participant to choose the location of their interview added to the comfort of the donors who agreed to participate. If it was determined that an in-person interview was not feasible due to travel constraints, health and safety concerns, or other reasons, I suggested that we schedule the interview to be held electronically over the platform Zoom so that there was still a face-to-face component to the interview. For those who were unable to access a computer for a Zoom-based interview, I suggested we schedule the interview via telephone.

There were 13 participants who indicated their age was 70 or older. This had an impact on the familiarity and comfort level with technology programs, like Zoom. Additionally, the age of participants paired with concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the caution regarding person-to-person interviews. The health and safety of participants in this study was a concern of mine when scheduling interviews, which is why participants were able to select the format of their interview.

The preference of interview type for this study was one-on-one interviews. For this type of interview, the researcher meets with each participant one at a time in order to ask them open-ended questions. This type of interview is ideal for interview participants who are comfortable and not hesitant to share their ideas with the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I was

able to interview 13 participants using this one-on-one method. Some participants were married to one another, and they scheduled their interviews to be held at the same time. If this was the case, I gave each participant the opportunity to answer each of the interview questions that was asked in order to have feedback from both parties. There were four individuals, or two couples, that I interviewed in this way. Another individual had her daughter present in her interview as her caretaker to assist her if she had any trouble answering questions.

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), interview approaches are selected based upon, “the accessibility of individuals, the cost, and the amount of time available” (p. 218). The most common form of collecting data through interviews is a person-to-person encounter (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I completed eight interviews with nine participants in a person-to-person format.

Technological advancements, along with the current climate of the world, have made the option of a web-based video interview a popular way of communicating. This interview type also allows individuals in different locations to meet face-to-face without having to be physically present in a room with someone. Additionally, some of the various video conferencing platforms have the ability to record meeting sessions through the software, so that there is not a need to use an additional piece of equipment, such as a digital recorder. Similar to a person-to-person interview, a web-based video interview includes one interview participant and one researcher in the session. I was able to interview five participants using the platform Zoom. Like the person-to-person interviews, I had participants who were married to one another schedule their interviews to be held simultaneously. There were two individuals, or one couple, that I interviewed in this way.

I also used telephone interviews for this study. This type of interview does not allow for any direct contact between participants and researcher. While this type of interview allows individuals to speak to one another when there is a geographical distance between the participant and interviewer, communication between parties may be limited. There is no direct visual contact, which may limit the attention span of participants if questioning lasts for a longer period of time. Also, the lack of visual contact between the participant and researcher does not allow the researcher to view any sort of body language or non-verbal cues that the participant may produce. I interviewed three individuals using this method.

Interviews lasted between 38 and 57 minutes based on participant responses. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested the use of an interview protocol as a tool that keeps the researcher organized as they ask participant questions. It also provides a structured place for any notes to be recorded during the interview. I developed the interview protocol for this study using guidelines from Creswell and Guetterman (2019). The interview protocol for this research study can be found in the Appendix. The protocol began with spaces to record the date, time, and location of the interview. This was followed by a section of reminders that could be easily accessed during the study. Reminders included: state the purpose of the study, review the consent form for this study, and check that I had all of the supplies that I needed for the interview (recording device, charger, and writing utensils).

The protocol then included open-ended research questions and potential probing questions with space to take notes to complement the interview transcript, including any body language or non-verbal cues. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that there is no specific number of open-ended questions that should be asked during an interview; however, five to 10 questions are commonly used by researchers. Finally, the protocol included suggestions for

closing comments to share with the interview participant. This included assurance of confidentiality, a description of member checking to ensure the internal validity of the interview content, and thanking them for their time and participation in the interview process.

Semi-structured interviews are guided by the list of questions the researcher has prepared, yet the order is not predetermined, and the wording of the questions can be flexible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this interview structure “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 111). The use of this structure allowed me to adapt as the interview progressed and gather the most relevant information from interview participants in terms of their motivations to give to small colleges and the individual experiences that influenced them. Probing questions were used in order to gather additional information during the interview. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described probing questions as a way to obtain additional information by asking interview participants to elaborate on answers that they have given or to clarify what they meant by answering a question in a certain way.

I recorded each interview after gaining permission from participants. Additionally, I took notes after each interview concluded. Audio recordings are the most common techniques used to record interview data, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The procedure ensures that all verbal responses are recorded and preserved for data analysis. Interviews were recorded using the audio recording feature that is available on my personal, password protected cell phone. The phone was placed in between me and the interview participant during the in-person interviews. For interviews that were conducted over the web-based platform, Zoom, the interview was recorded and saved to the computer using the recording feature built into the software. For interviews that were conducted over the phone, I used my work office to take the phone call. I

used my work landline and placed the call on speaker so I could record the interview using my personal cell phone. I also used an audio recorder to have an additional recording of each interview in case there was a malfunction with either the recording feature on my phone or the recording feature on Zoom. The additional method of taking notes about the interview was used to ensure that non-verbal behaviors were also recorded by me and that my reflections were also recorded.

Each interview was then transcribed using the transcription software, Scribie Audio/Video Transcription Services and then edited by me to ensure accuracy and encourage familiarity with the data that were collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that by transcribing the interview, the researcher will be able to fill in any spots that do not sound clear on the recording because of their familiarity with the subject matter and terminology (p. 132). The transcripts were double-spaced documents. I identified each of the interview questions from the interview protocol by typing the question numbers into the document. I also made sure that comments I made during the interview were noted as mine and that interview participant's comments were correctly denoted as theirs. I listened to the recording of each interview multiple times in order to ensure the transcript was accurate and to identify and organize themes as I analyzed the data.

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) noted the importance of organization in order to properly prepare for the data analysis process, which includes the transcription of any data prior to the data analysis process. I organized the data in this research study by using the UA Box feature that is connected to my university student account. This is a password protected account. I created a folder that contained all of the data I obtained during the research study. The folder also contained subfolders for each study participant which included a scanned copy of the

interview protocol for each participant as their interview was completed, a copy of the consent form, the recording of each participant's interview, and the transcription of each participant's interview. Additionally, the main UA Box folder contained a list of the pseudonyms for the names of all study participants. There was also a color coded key in the UA Box folder that denoted the colors that corresponded to each of the themes that were uncovered.

### **Data Analysis**

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis focuses on the meaning of the data across an entire data set. This method is for “systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). This method of data analysis provided me with insight into the shared patterns of donor experiences and specific influential moments that were shared over the course of the decision-making process. Each interview was assessed in terms of identifying patterns and commonalities in donor responses to their motivations in participating in planned giving.

Data analysis by hand is a time consuming process. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described hand data analysis as a process that requires the researcher to read, mark, and divide the data into parts. Methods of data analysis include color coding the themes or cutting and pasting certain sentences that support the themes onto cards. I color coded the transcriptions of the interviews in order to visualize the themes that were uncovered throughout the course of the data analysis process.

Upon the conclusion of each interview, I wrote down my key takeaways from the interview in order to assist with the data analysis process. I chose to upload all of my transcripts at one time, rather than uploading each one for transcription as they were completed. I made this

decision so that I could pay for the transcription services at one time, rather than having multiple individual payments for the service. When interview transcripts were delivered to me, I reviewed each one with the assistance of the original audio recording in order to make sure that the appropriate edits had been made.

Through the data analysis process, I kept my theoretical framework of social identity theory at the forefront of my mind. I read all of the transcripts and with the assistance of my notes of the key takeaways, I began to make additional notes of similarities that I noticed in the interviews during my reading. Using social identity theory as my lens through which to view the data, I focused on the shared patterns of identity that emerged between each participant's interview. I also focused on connections with Southeastern College that participants described. These connections were how I perceived the participants to be members of a group through the lens of the social identity theory. I then created text-segment codes that described the patterns I was seeing while reading. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a text segment code as the process of assigning a phrase or word that describes a portion of text. I reduced the codes that described the various patterns I was seeing to a more manageable list of codes while keeping both prior research and my research questions in mind. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested reducing the number of codes to 20 to 30 codes. I was then able to reduce the codes to the six themes of: membership through connection, meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition. In each of these thematic categories, there were also subcategories that emerged through the data analysis.

### **Delimitations**

When researching the topic of planned giving, I became interested in the reasons why individuals choose to give in this capacity. Prior research points to a variety of different reasons

this may be the case, but much of the research has focused on colleges and universities that have a much larger student enrollment level, thus a much larger donor base. Therefore, I chose to conduct my research study at a college with low student enrollment to explore a category of college/university that is often overlooked in research.

Southeastern College was able to provide me with a limited list of individual donors who met my definition of being a planned donor by officially communicating with the college their intentions to participate in planned giving and the college had documentation of the agreement. It was important to me that the intention to give a planned gift had been executed in an official capacity. I believe that the motivation to research and be interested in something is different than the motivation to take the initiative and follow through on a task. I was interested in speaking with individuals who were confirmed to have made the decision to make a planned gift. This limited the number of participants for my study. It is likely that using donor bases from additional colleges of similar size would have expanded my pool of participants.

### **Limitations**

While I expected that participants in this study were candid and honest with their answers, it is possible that individuals did not share their true motivations for giving through planned giving. Prior research has suggested that there are some self-serving motivations in giving large financial gifts to an institution. Some self-serving motivations would be to have their name memorialized on a building or to be appointed to the board of trustees at an institution. It is possible that individuals chose to omit self-serving motivations from their answers in order to influence the perception of themselves. If this was the case, then collected data would be affected by the omission.

Also, there were four individuals or two couples that were interviewed together for this study. While participants who were interviewed together were both given the opportunity to answer questions, this created a challenge for the flow of the interview. There is a possibility that individuals would have shared additional information had they not been interviewed with their partner.

Additionally, all study participants self-identified as being white/Caucasian on the demographic questionnaire. This was not intentional; however, the racial profile of participants only represents a limited view of the experiences that donors may have had when choosing to pursue a planned gift in higher education.

### **Positionality Statement**

I began my career in higher education immediately upon graduation from my undergraduate institution. During that time, I had worked in various offices including finance services, academic affairs, student affairs, and most recently, development. In each of these positions I have seen a different aspect of higher education which has encouraged me to learn on my own and do further research on topics that interest me. Over the course of this study, I have been employed as a development officer at a small college with low student enrollment, which influenced my interest in the topic of planned giving. I have been intentional with the measures I have taken to mitigate my own biases. My place of employment and position at my place of employment was not shared with study participants. A representative from Southeastern College contacted each of the potential participants prior to my initial contact in order to introduce me as a researcher and graduate student. When contacting participants to schedule interviews, I used my University of Alabama email address in order to make sure that I was seen as a researcher instead of a development officer. It was important to me that study participants answered the

interview questions without knowing my institutional or career affiliation. I believe that these intentional steps to make sure that my role in this research was as the primary investigator and researcher mitigated the influence that I might have had with interview participants had they not been taken.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama prior to data collection. An informed consent form was included in the materials that were submitted to the Institutional Review Board. This form consisted of an overview of the study, what would be required of the participant, a statement of risks and benefits, a confidentiality statement, and information on the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to represent them in the data. Additionally, no identifying information was used in study findings to ensure that identities of the participants were protected.

Study participants were donors to a specific institution. One of the risks associated with this was the potential negative impact on the institution if a donor were to change their mind about giving a planned gift as a result of this interview. In order to mitigate this risk, I submitted my Institutional Review Board approval letter from the University of Alabama, my Institutional Review Board approval letter from Southeastern College, my Informed Consent form, and my interview protocol to the identified gatekeeper along with my request for a list of planned gift donors to the college. This step allowed Southeastern College to be fully informed of the intent of my research and the steps I took to ethically complete my research.

## Quality Assurance

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that researchers use multiple validity procedures to assess the accuracy of study findings. I used multiple strategies to assess the internal and external validity as well as the reliability of the study. My utilization of member checking, the presentation of counter themes that emerged in the study, and use of an interview protocol that was consistent between each participant assisted in providing this study with internal validity. External validity was established through the use of a thorough literature review and the use of social identity theory to guide the creation of interview questions as well as influence the data analysis portion of the study.

The strategy of member checking to determine the internal validity of the study involved soliciting feedback from study participants who were interviewed in order to determine consistency between the my interpretation of the interview and participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described member checking through an additional interview or in writing with a study participant as a way to validate findings and provide evidence that the qualitative study is accurate. Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the validity strategy of member checking as “taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 200). I gave each study participant the opportunity to check the accuracy of the descriptions of the interviews and the interpretation of the themes that emerged during data analysis. I chose to reach out to all participants in the study for member checking because the number of participants made it feasible and I was not sure if all of participants would respond to member checking communication.

The presentation of the counter themes in a study adds to the credibility of a research study, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018). A discussion of information that is discrepant to the themes in the research makes the results of the study more realistic to the readers. While the majority of data analysis builds upon the evidence in support of the research themes, it is unrealistic to assume that all of the data will be in support of the themes. In order to present the research more comprehensively, a discussion of the data that were counter to the themes added to the credibility of this research study. This discussion aids in the realistic presentation of the data.

Finally, reaching the point of data saturation was another form of quality assurance for this study. When no new themes were present and other researchers have the ability to replicate the study, data saturation has been reached (Guest et al., 2006). I completed 17 interviews before deciding to proceed with data analysis. Once the data analysis process was complete, it was clear that no other themes were emerging, and that data saturation had been achieved.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The findings listed in this chapter were collected from interviews with 17 individuals who had provided Southeastern College with official documentation of their planned gift agreement and were confirmed as planned gift donors by the institutional gatekeeper. My main research question was: What motivates donors to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving? Additional research questions focused on donor motivations:

- (1) What motivates donors to participate in planned giving philanthropic initiatives at small colleges?
- (2) What are specific experiences that donors describe as important to their decision to make a planned gift?

A participant's identity played a role in their motivations for donating through planned giving. Using social identity theory as my lens through which to view the data, I focused on the descriptions that participants shared about themselves as well as the shared patterns of motivation that emerged between each participant's interview. The role that participant identity played in the motivation to give a planned gift is further explained through the six themes that emerged through data analysis: membership through connection, meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition. Subcategories emerged through data analysis in some of the thematic categories. The themes in this section are

organized from the most prevalent to least prevalent in the interview component of this study. Multiple themes emerged during individual interviews.

### **Membership through Connection**

Social identity theory relies on an individual's perceived membership in a group. An individual's perception of membership influences their behaviors as they strive to be like others in the group. Individuals may choose to behave in ways they perceive as aligning with the group and view situations with the group in mind so that they establish social order for themselves. Data for this research study were viewed using social identity theory as a lens. This section addresses the first research question: What motivates donors to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving?

First, I was interested to hear how participants described themselves and if these descriptions were connected in any way. The initial description that participants gave me of themselves helped me to discern what was important to them. I began each interview by asking participants to tell me about themselves. I prepared some probing questions in case they did not know where to begin. The characteristics and stories that were shared helped me to form an identity for each participant. What they chose to share by telling their story varied between individual participants. However, each participant described their connection to Southeastern College at some point in their answer to this first question. The connection to Southeastern College was important to participants. I perceived this connection to Southeastern College as a form of membership that all participants shared with one another. Participants identified themselves as alumni of the college, spouses of alumni, retired staff from the college, those who attended the college but did not graduate, and those connected to the college through the church. This finding is consistent with prior research by McDearmon (2013) which suggested alumni

integrate the role of being an alumnus into their personal identity. Additionally, alumni with an increased role identity with their institution were more likely to support the institution through various behaviors such as donating, volunteering, and attending events on campus.

The alumni of the college noted their experience in choosing to attend Southeastern College when I asked them to tell me about themselves. For some individuals, this was the first thing they shared when I asked them to tell me about themselves. I interpreted this to mean that they credited their time spent at Southeastern College as an influential period in their lives. Other individuals began with stories describing the closeness of their families and how that family relationship paired with parental suggestion to stay close to home and influenced them to attend Southeastern College because it was proximal to their family home. James began by telling me about his parents and how he decided to attend Southeastern College because of his mother. As he reflected on his decision to attend Southeastern College, he laughed remembering how upset his mother was that he was going to leave home:

My mother was heartbroken that I was gonna be leaving town, and she was letting it be known, that it would be great if I could find a place to go to school here. And said, Mom, I don't know if I'm that interested in that, but I'll look around a little bit...I started looking around and [Southeastern College] came to mind, came across my path...I just to be very frank with you, in those years, and that would have been... I started there in [year]. I learned the little fact that there was seven girls for every guy that was enrolled, and I thought, well, I'll give it a year.

This description made the decision to attend Southeastern College sound as if it were by chance. However, it seemed as if family was important to James and paired with the desire to fulfill his

mother's wishes and stay closer to home ultimately led him to a place that shaped his adult identity.

Susan had a similar experience to James. Her mother also recommended that she stay close to home when she was choosing where she should attend college:

My mother suggested that I start at [Southeastern College]...I think you need to start at [Southeastern College] and give it a year, and then if you don't like that, and maybe think about going to a bigger university. So that's what I did, and I loved it. So I say, [Southeastern College] was great for me.

Susan described herself as shy during our interview. However, Susan's presentation during our interview was confident and concise. She was thoughtful throughout the interview, and all of her answers to questions were collected and straight to the point. Her attendance at a college close to home was suggested by her mother in order to provide a sort of safety and comfort to her. Like James, she planned to attend Southeastern College temporarily before making the transition to a bigger school. Bill, however, chose to attend college in order to avoid being drafted:

Well, I went to [Southeastern College] and I started in [year], and that was after a year off between high school and college, and I enrolled in [Southeastern College] because I was going to be drafted possibly, and then finally in that drawing, I got a high number, but it was the best step I ever made.

Southeastern College was a sort of safety net for Bill. However, his decision to attend sparked his interest in the arts. He described his current interests, such as attending opera performances, and seemed thankful for the direction that his life went because of the opportunities that Southeastern College offered to him. Like other participants, his decision to attend was influenced by external factors, rather than an intrinsic desire to attend. While it was not his initial

intention to attend college there, he recognized that his choice to attend assisted in molding him into the person he is today. Tom decided to enroll at Southeastern College because his older brother was a student there. He reflected on being a high school student and getting excited whenever he was able to visit his brother before he decided to enroll:

I decided to end up at [Southeastern College], and my brother went there as well, so he graduated a year ahead of me, so...roommates, my first semester in college, which was interesting. We got along. It was fun. But those are really fun times.

While Tom did not describe his decision to attend Southeastern College as something influenced by outside factors, he was introduced to the college through a family member who attended. This family connection allowed him to get his foot in the door and experience the college as a family member of a student before making the decision to attend with his older brother.

Tony did not attend Southeastern College, but he recalled that his family had been connected to it through the church for a long time. Tony was very proud of his family connection to Southeastern College:

The [religious affiliation] conference has held its annual meetings there for as long as I have been involved in the [religious affiliation] conference, so it's just been always part of the life that I've been involved in with the church.

Each of these narratives are explanations of the initial connections that participants shared with Southeastern College. These were influential periods in participants' lives. The way that each participant chose to introduce themselves during the interview spoke to the connection that each participant had with Southeastern College. When viewed using social identity theory as a lens, this connection could also be viewed as an individual's membership to a group associated with Southeastern College.

## **Meaningful Personal Experiences**

Study participants recalled experiences and connections they made because of their relationship with Southeastern College. Eleven participants shared stories that focused on a meaningful experience in their lives that they connected to Southeastern College. As I discussed planned giving with participants, they reflected on prior experiences and the influence those experiences had had on their life. These experiences and connections were described as influential factors when participants were asked about their motivations for giving a planned gift to Southeastern College. Many of these experiences included descriptions of relationships that were fostered between the participant and other individuals including friends, spouses, or network connections. Tom and his husband recently became connected with Southeastern College again. Tom said, “I wanna give a substantial gift to [Southeastern College}. Those were... Those four years were the best years... The best years of my life.” Tom reminisced about his time as a student at Southeastern College and seemed to enjoy sharing stories with me that his husband was also hearing for the first time. Our interview was similar to looking through a yearbook.

I asked participants to describe their relationship with Southeastern College. In their responses, participants described a variety of experiences they had had over the course of their life that they traced back to a meaningful personal experience connecting them with Southeastern College. These meaningful experiences often kept participants involved in various capacities throughout the year. Additionally, participants recalled significant learning experiences that gave them more information on planned giving and introduced it as a viable giving option for them to consider in the future.

Susan attributed many of her adult experiences to connections that she made while she was a student at Southeastern College. The meaningful experiences for her affected the personal relationships that she had with other people, including her friends and ex-husband, as well as her career. Susan was very passionate when speaking about the people with whom she made connections because of her attendance as a student at Southeastern College:

I attribute getting my job and launching my career, to people from [Southeastern College]. All of my friends to this day, my closest friends, are friends from college. And I met my husband there and was married for...[length of marriage]. So all of that came from [Southeastern College], core group of friends, my spouse, my career. I can all tie all of that back to [Southeastern College].

Many participants described connections they made through Southeastern College. These connections varied between family, friendships, or connections with staff members at the college. I interpreted these connections as being meaningful to participants because their descriptions of the experiences associated with these different people seemed to affect who the participant was today. Tony also shared that while he did not attend Southeastern College, his family had been involved with the college from a very early time:

Okay, I did have one of my grandfather's brothers, a great uncle, [name of great uncle], they called him The Agent for [Southeastern College]. When they moved from [previous city] to [current city], he was in charge of procuring the land and raising the money for that move, and he did that.

The strong connection that Tony had with Southeastern College because of his family was important to him and one of the reasons he chose to give a planned gift to the College. His family's involvement with the college throughout his life allowed Tony to make his own

connection. This personal experience of sharing a history of helping the college with his family motivated him to give a planned gift. Tony became connected to the church through his career choices, like many of his family members. Sharing this connection made Tony especially proud:

One of the reasons...was to honor my family. My family has been associated with the [religious affiliation] church for a good, long time, and that's what I intended to do, to remember them. So I've had, great uncles and cousins, and so we have been associated with the [religious affiliation] church in [state], for 175 years or so. That is what motivated me or what I wanted to do is remember our family with this college.

Bob also described his connection to Southeastern College beginning very early in his life. Bob was very quiet, and his stories were a whisper through the phone. As one of the oldest participants in this study, he was most comfortable using the telephone to speak with me. Bob's stories were incredibly descriptive. He told stories about each new person he introduced during his interview. I could tell how important each person was to him through his specific story of each of them. He said, "My giving to a [religious affiliation] education is based on family relationships...My mother, was a [year] graduate, of [Southeastern College] and her father was a [religious affiliation] minister." Bob further explained his family connection with Southeastern College, stating, "When my grandfather died in [year] they asked [his grandmother] to come serve as a postmistress, so she did. So I remember going up there as a child to visit her." This early connection with the college through family relationships and experiences mirrored Tony's experience. Both of these men had positive childhood memories that they associated with Southeastern College.

Rachel shared a family connection with Southeastern College as well. She spoke fondly of the time that her granddaughter decided to attend her alma mater:

In fact, when [granddaughter] went to [Southeastern College], decided to go, we went in and talked to the president and he just wanted us to come talk to him. So I went and she had a full scholarship to [Southeastern College], and I said, No, give that to somebody else, I am paying her way, so I just sent her there.

Rachel continued her story and shared that her granddaughter had been the only person in her family, other than herself, who decided to attend Southeastern College. She beamed with the pride of sharing this experience with her beloved granddaughter. This was important to Rachel and the bond that she described between her and her granddaughter over the shared institution was one that she held dear. Rachel had one of her daughters present in her interview who helped clarify questions for me and prompted her mother to share more.

Participants also told stories of the sacrifice that it sometimes took in order to attend college or to have a career. One of the experiences that Laura shared with me was the college experiences of her parents, particularly her stepfather. Laura recalled that her stepfather did not finish college. Her family's financial status as she was growing up did not allow for this. It was meaningful to her that her father put her and her siblings before his desire to finish college. Laura became emotional and her voice cracked as she said:

He didn't get to finish college because of us, he married a woman with three little children, and he wanted to put us in [religious affiliation] school to get a good education, and so that's where our family money went instead of him to sacrifice for the family.

This experience was one that Laura kept in mind as she was able to attend college. The sacrifice of her stepfather to stop college and put her and her sibling's education first was important as she made the decision to give a planned gift later in her life.

Additionally, many participants reflected on their relationships with friends they made through Southeastern College. The experiences that participants had with their college friends were shared with positivity. These experiences were full of joy, and participants smiled as they reflected on them. A few participants shared that they still kept in contact with these friends with the assistance of social media. Lisa said that she “made life-long friends, some of them I communicate with almost on a daily basis through their Facebook.” Lisa was excited to still be connected to these friends and expressed that she was thankful that she was still able to see what was going on in their lives. Tom said that he, “Had a lot of good friends. And still keep in touch with them through Facebook and some other social media.” Rachel also spoke of the friends she made while she was a student at Southeastern College. Her group seemed to be very close knit, especially because her daughter knew who each person was. Rachel and her daughter both smiled she shared stories about this group of women who are so important to them both:

We were all basically the same type girl, very motivated to have close, close friends, stay close friends, and campus seemed to lend itself to that... You can't name anything that I didn't love about it... I really, there was nothing... I did not love to do and go and still see friends that were there, close friends and distant friends.

When describing their relationship with Southeastern College, some participants described their connection to the college as one that helped them start their careers. This led me to believe that the participants credited Southeastern College with how they first entered their professional careers. Without some of the experiences participants described, I believe that individuals felt as if they may not have been where they were today. This is consistent with research by Sun et al. (2007) who suggested that student experiences significantly influenced alumni donations upon graduation, especially if the individual perceived the institution to have

contributed to their educational experience which later contributed to their career trajectory. Lisa explained that her career began because of the work experience she secured while attending Southeastern College as a student and the connections that she made with staff members:

I started my work career working for a bank through [Southeastern College] connections. Again, the whole time I was in [Southeastern College], I worked in the registrar's office. And one of the ladies there, her husband was a vice president, and so she gave me a good recommendation, and I started as a computer programmer. And soon moved to the [description of job title] and had a 25 year career.

Susan described a similar experience in which she attributed the beginning of her career to connections that she made through networking opportunities while she was a student at Southeastern College:

I graduated on my birthday, so that was a big week, and I got that job due to sorority connections. I already had two sorority sisters who were a year ahead of me and had started working at [place of employment] in town, so that was the connection to me, it was a networking thing that helped me get my foot in the door there, and I worked there for 15 years.

Both Lisa and Susan attributed the beginnings of their career paths through connections they made while they were students at Southeastern College. This experience was something they both remembered as meaningful because of their success in their careers.

Participants continue to be involved with Southeastern College in different capacities throughout their adult life. Some participants volunteered their time by advising organizations or serving on either the Board of Trustees or Alumni Association Board for the college. Participants described this type of experience as an honor. This finding is consistent with research by

Newman (2011) who suggested that alumni who were members of a dues paying alumni association were also more likely to give back to their alma mater than those who were not members. In a study by Newman (2011), individuals who were current members of the alumni association were 4.8 times more likely to philanthropically give to the institution compared to those individuals that were not members of the alumni association. Additionally, this provided participants with a platform to learn more about the inner workings of higher education. This knowledge allowed participants to make more informed decisions regarding their support of the college and allowed participants to give feedback to college officials in a way that they may not have had without their position within the college board structure. Susan described her involvement as being continuous throughout the years:

I've always been engaged in some capacity, maybe... I don't know, it wasn't very long, maybe. Just three or four years after I graduated [year of graduation], I became an advisor to the sorority, and then I was an advisor in some capacity to the sorority for [number of years], so I was very engaged. You know, I was there on campus a lot with that, and then I went on the board of trustees, I think that was in [year] maybe. So yeah, between that, the advising of the sorority and then being on the board, it's been consistent since just a few years after graduation.

Bill also reflected on his connection to Southeastern College through his service on the Alumni Association Board. He was excited to be involved with the Alumni Board and to share his experiences with other alumni while holding that position:

I was on the alumni board pretty soon after I graduated. And then when I went to [state], I said, I'm sorry, there aren't enough graduates up here for me to have any meetings or do any meetings and I can't fly back for your meeting. Sorry. And so I was off the board for

a while, and I got back on when I got back to [city]. So eventually I was the President of the alumni board. And I enjoyed that... I just...[Southeastern College] people are so nice...easy to work with and get volunteers and stuff, so it taught me a lot about managing a board too...

This type of experience was not only an honor for these individuals but also an experience that taught them about the responsibilities of serving in some capacity. These experiences kept individuals connected through responsibility to serve.

### **Learning Experiences**

I asked participants how they learned about the option of giving back philanthropically through planned giving initiatives. Participants were often able to recall when they first learned of this option. There were eight participants who shared specific career opportunities or other learning experiences that introduced them to the option of philanthropy through planned giving. None of the participants mentioned learning of this option through any materials sent in the mail. Many of these experiences were through their chosen career paths or family connections that related to careers in the finance sector. This finding is consistent with prior research by Smith (2013) who indicated that attitudes regarding giving could be influenced by the individual's employer. Participants in this study expressed the sentiment that "their eyes had been opened" to the importance of giving; felt as if they gave more because of the influence of their employer; and gave more volunteer time, more money, and overall gave more support to charities (Smith, 2013). Other ways that participants mentioned learning about planned giving were through classes they voluntarily chose to take or personal communication with college advancement officers about the topic.

Alice seemed very eager to learn. In addition to her story of how she learned of planned giving, she also shared that she and her husband take continuing education course at their church. Alice first became introduced to the concept of planned giving by her boss. Prior to retiring, she worked in a field that directly related to finances:

The way that I learned about it, of course, I was a [job title] and so I think I learned a lot there, but I learned a lot from the family that I worked for too...Because he was very generous, and I learned some of the things. Some of things that we've done and like giving appreciated stock it's a way to not have that tax, and then they're more to give and like an insurance policy where you give... You give the money to pay premiums, so that's another way, you know? I thought, well, no, you may not have \$100,000 to give. But with an insurance policy you can.

This experience gave Alice the knowledge about different ways to philanthropically give to organizations. Bill also learned about planned giving when he worked with grants. He said:

I learned a lot about giving, whenever I was doing the grant proposals, and I learned you need to have fully involved board... And you never have a meeting of alumna without asking for something, so I came prepared with my check...

Similar to Alice and Bill, Rob spent part of his career in a field that introduced him to different ways to give back to organizations. He said, "I've done a lot of work in philanthropy, and yet I find myself acting like a donor when I get emotional about this stuff, even though I'm in the midst." Rob recalled his recent decision to change the organization that would receive his and his husband's planned gift. Rob was very honest during the interview as he described his disappointment in an organization to which he initially wanted to leave his money. I could tell

that he was upset with the organization and that he really wanted his values to be represented by organizations with which he was involved:

We had planned to leave pretty much half of our estate to [a college], whatever was left. I'm in the business and I understand leadership and I understand how things happen...but the way things have gone down at [a college], there's been several things that over the past few years have really bothered me...[problems at college]. A gift officer comes to visit me and she makes no mention of the bequest, no mention of anything except asking for more money. And I thought, do you not know what I do for a living? Or do you not know what I've done for the college, or what we've done from the college, and she's never asked to meet [husband], so I'm sort of done.

When asked about his introduction to planned giving, Steve recalled knowing about it because of his father's career. As he reflected, he recalled his father's work with stocks, particularly at the end of a fiscal year:

I've always seen his side because he's a money manager, he does, basically manage their stocks and bonds and everything, and he trades them, so that's why I don't call him just a stock broker, he can trade them if they call and say, I wanna make a trade. He manages most of these companies' and people's individual retirement accounts, so I always saw him particularly the end of the year, scrambling to do year-end donations for people.

Philanthropy itself is taught in some capacity. This leads me to believe that a more structured way of presenting information on planned gift donations could be beneficial to advancement offices. Planned giving is not the typical option that donors choose to pursue when donating to an organization. Additionally, this indicates that materials sent to individuals in the mail about a philanthropic giving option of planned giving would likely not increase the number

of planned gift donors. This observation is consistent with research by Levine (2008) who suggested that the number of communication materials sent to alumni did not seem to affect their overall participation in giving back to their alma mater or the amount they chose to donate.

### **Pay It Forward**

Some participants expressed a sense of indebtedness to Southeastern College and chose to give a planned gift in order to pay the college back for the experience they had. Nine participants spoke of this feeling of indebtedness and the desire to *pay it forward*. These participants were eager for current students to benefit from their collegiate experience the same way they did when they attended the college. Participants said that they were thanking the college for their experience by being able to donate through planned giving later in their lives. Tom stated, "It's like a reward. I just feel like, thank you. And this is a way of doing it. And luckily, we're able to do it in a nicer way than 50 bucks here and there." Rob shared this mentality noting, "From a purely financial sense, if the college gave me a great deal, why not do something like that?" Both Tom and Rob felt the need to thank Southeastern College. They suggested they had been given a great deal from the college, so they both chose to give back through planned giving as a way to pay the college back for what it had done for them. Mike added to this by sharing that he and his wife chose to give, "Just as a way of thanking the college for the opportunities that they've given us. Paying it forward. Saying thank you to the college that gave us such vast opportunities with our education."

Alice shared that she did not know how she would have made it through college without the help of donors. She spoke of her financial insecurity while she was in college and shared that both she and her mother thought there may have been someone who was helping pay for her to

attend the school. We had to pause the interview because Alice began to cry when she remembered this story from college. Once we began recording again, she said:

Okay, so one of the things that I think really motivated me I didn't even know it at the time, but when I had graduated from high school my father got an insurance policy that would pay...it would pay for my education, if something happened to him. He died two months later. And my mother...she'd send me to the business office to ask them something and it's like, you don't owe anything. And she's like, I don't know, I don't know who is paying for all of it, she thought that somebody was paying for me...besides the insurance company, I don't know. I really don't know, but it was very...it really made an impact on me...

Similar to Alice, Bill was the recipient of financial assistance when he was a student at Southeastern College. Bill's sister saw the positive impact that attending Southeastern College was having on Bill and made sure to help fund his collegiate experience until he was able to graduate. Bill expressed the hope that his gift would help other students to have a similar experience:

[Bill's sister] knew about the college and I told her that it was developing and what good things that it had done for me. She could see that it was really meaningful to me...so often in those days, she didn't mind giving me whatever I needed to kinda finish it off. I want to do that for...students.

Laura also felt a sense of indebtedness to Southeastern College. She discussed her motivation to give a planned gift as one that was tied to her gratefulness to attend college:

I was very, very grateful for the opportunity to go to a school like [Southeastern College] and get a degree. And so my goal, my motivation, was doing the best I could and making

the most out of the privilege of being allowed to go to school there, and so I really was driven to get straight As and to graduate with honors and... as kind of a way to pay [Southeastern College] back.

Consistent with research by Marr et al. (2005), participants who spoke of receiving some sort of financial aid while in college became a donor later in life. A need-based scholarship increases the probability that a graduate will give by 5% to 13% (Marr et al., 2005). This is an example of an individual with a pay it forward mentality. Since they were able to receive funding to assist them in attending college, they were eager to do the same for students when they had the financial capability to do so later in life.

### **Advancement of the College**

Participants spoke of the importance of progress. Nine participants associated some form of college advancement with their motivation to give a planned gift. For some, this meant physical changes to campus or changes that affected policy. This finding is consistent with research by Taylor and Martin (1995) who reported that 61% of donors perceived a financial need from the institution. Joe was very talkative during his interview. In the midst of a lighthearted conversation with him, he paused and with a serious tone stated, “I hope that they use it in the right way. I hope they do use it in the right way because I work hard to be able to make money.” His hope for progress at Southeastern College was tied with his trust that his gift would be put to good use.

On the other hand, many participants spoke of the preservation of the traditions that they associated with Southeastern College. Steve shared his hope for the college to maintain its footprint. Steve said, “I want the college to keep going. I want it to be permanent.” James fondly recalled that both he and his wife had a positive experience when they were students. For him,

giving through planned giving was connected to the preservation of the experience they had as students. He said, “We know our experience here and it still exists, and we love [Southeastern College] and we want it to stay around for many, many, many, many years.”

David recalled that his time as a student at Southeastern College was much different than the experiences that he believed students had today. He said, “I think there weren't strong connections with minority communities, especially Blacks, they just were not there when I was there.” David did not live in close proximity to the college now, but he shared that he often traveled back to the area and enjoyed seeing the progress of both the city and Southeastern College. He described his decision to give a planned gift to the college as being connected to the type of student who attends:

Well, I think most important is who's there, and that's the big change...is the Black students and the students who are having a tough time finding enough money to be there, and stay there. Because you can get an education at 100 different places, and [Southeastern College] is pretty good, but that's what I was interested in, is who goes to school.

For others, this meant advancing the role that formal education played in a person's life. All of these feelings came from participants that seemed to truly enjoy their experiences with the college. This finding is consistent with research by Monks (2002) who suggested alumni who reported that they were “very satisfied” with their undergraduate experience donated a monetary donation of 2.6 times more than their fellow alumni. Tom reflected on his experience as a student at Southeastern College and the importance of Student Life to his college experience. Tom did not describe himself as being overly involved with student organization as an undergraduate student, but he felt as if the experiences that he had helped him get out of his comfort zone. He

wanted his planned gift to help students who were enrolled at the college, specifically their experience in Student Life:

I think the older you get it's almost like legacy becomes this thing and being able to give back to the college and to help students...We wanna help those be able to have a good experience and be able to maybe have a better experience if there's more money and funding available to do more.

Tom's experience was supportive of research results by Garvey and Drezner (2019) who indicated that the giving behaviors of LGBTQ alumnus were influenced by undergraduate student experiences. Additionally, the authors reported that a positive perception of the campus climate towards LGBTQ individuals positively affected the probability of those individuals to donate to the institution as an alumnus (Garvey & Drezner, 2019).

Steve also recalled his experience as a student at Southeastern College. He, too, was particularly interested in the Student Life component. Steve was proud of his leadership experiences and the work he did within the Greek community while he was a student. He shared concern about the college drifting away from the experience that he was able to have and voiced that he wanted to preserve that type of experience for future students. Steve said, "I certainly believe in the college, and with everything I have. I would like to see the college changed back to where fraternities and sororities were surviving." Steve was heavily involved in campus life when he was enrolled. He referred to his time in a fraternity as one that was influential in teaching him about charity. Steve said, "I was always trying to help keep the fraternity afloat because it was just like today, where the fraternities are small and they're always struggling financially." This finding is consistent with research by Wunnava and Okunade (2013) who suggested that those involved in Greek life in college were likely donors upon graduation.

Additionally, the heavy involvement of both Steve and Tom in Student Life was consistent with research by Weerts and Cabrera (2018) who suggested civic involvement as an undergraduate student was an indicator of philanthropic behavior upon graduation.

### **Tradition**

Participants spoke of the traditions they associated with Southeastern College. This subtheme was evident in interviews with five participants. It was important to participants that the college made an effort to preserve experiences that they provided to students. Participants who were alumni of the college spoke of their time as a student and indicated that they were hopeful that current students had similar experiences. The small size of the campus was something that many participants enjoyed about their experience, even after they graduated.

Laura said:

I like the small college tradition, and knowing [Southeastern College], the opportunities that a student has going through here to develop leadership, if they want to. The opportunities are there. It's not like the large schools where you're just someone else. So I love working with the students and working with most of the faculty.

Mary further spoke of the small size of Southeastern College and discussed the alumni base and its role in the financial support of the college. Mary described many professional connections during her interview. She was proud to be associated with the hard work that she put into her career. That pride could also be seen in how she spoke of the alumni of Southeastern College. She said, "Probably, they're not many [Southeastern College] graduates that could write you a \$50 million check, but a lot of little ants can carry big things. Yeah, that's probably one of the sustaining things for a college this size." This sentiment is consistent with previous research by

Le Blanc and Rucks (2008) who suggested that in higher education, a small percentage of alumni comprised a large portion of the major gifts donated to the college.

Tony mentioned that the connection between the college and the church was important to him. He did not attend Southeastern College. He actually attended a rival institution. When asked about his motivation to give, he noted the connection to the church. He felt that Southeastern College was more intentional about its religious affiliation than his alma mater:

I have appreciated the college over the years, and I've appreciated the efforts to relate the college to the church and do that openly and say without reserve that one of the goals is faith. I have appreciated that very much...and it has been more directly related to the church than [a college]...That's the reason I chose Southeastern College.

### **Educational Value**

Participants spoke of the value of education. Seven participants viewed education as a means to better one's circumstances. Tom said, "I'm a huge believer in education, and I don't really care what people major in, I just want them to go to a school that they can have open dialogue and learn stuff, learn how to be real people." Alice stated her motivation for giving a planned gift:

I think it's because [spouse] and I both value education a lot. We think that is the way to get people...to get people out of their circumstances better than anything else, you know people who live in poverty. To me, that's just the best way.

For some participants, the value of education was something that was personally important to them because they had experience with seeing what a formal education could do in someone's life. This finding is consistent with research by Stephenson and Bell (2014) who indicated 43% of participants donated to help students who were currently enrolled. Daniel also placed a strong

value on the education of future generations. He shared the opinion that education was the way to better one's circumstances. Daniel mentioned other organizations during our interview, and they all placed high value on education. Daniel very passionately shared:

Because education is the deal breaker. Without education...the area that I live here in [state], we don't have a middle class; you either have or you don't have. And that's what it's evolved into, an education is the deal breaker. Those that are educated can get a good job and take care of themselves, and if you don't have an education, you can't. I just think an education is critical.

Mike shared this sentiment and shared that his motivation to give a planned gift was tied with the opportunities that it could give future students to have a formal education:

I just want to keep the college at the top of its game, and scholarships, I think helps because it allows students that maybe don't have the economics that others do, it allows them the opportunity to go because they get all these different scholarships.

Laura and Steve both spoke of the value of education in terms of their own degrees. It was important to both of them that the college maintained its reputation so that their college degrees continued to have value. Laura said:

When you tell someone you went to [Southeastern College] in [city], they go, really? Oh, wow. That's a good school. Yeah, so I wanna keep that reputation going, it's important because my degree is only as good as the college is today or tomorrow or the next. As good as the current value of the college.

Similarly, Steve spoke of his desire for his college degree to maintain its value. Steve had young children and was becoming more concerned with what education would look like for them. He shared hopes of his children one day attending Southeastern College:

I want my degree to be worth something. I want the college to only get better, so that my degree is worth something, and so that my degree is something that my child might consider going there and cause I'd love to have one of my kids go to [Southeastern College]... It's just, I want there to be that continuity.

### **Duty**

Nine participants described their motivation to give a planned gift as just doing the right thing. This theme seemed to be a type of responsibility to participants. Since participants have control over their finances, they seemed motivated to put them towards what they perceived to be a good use. Participants who felt that giving through planned giving was simply the right thing to do told me about their feelings through a sort of mantra. Giving was something almost innate to these participants. Daniel felt like giving a planned gift was the right thing for him to do:

And I think back again to those who much has been given much will be required. So that's one of the reasons why I gave it because I know it was the right thing to do. I guess that is the main reason why I gave.

Consistent with prior research, married participants expressed the importance of all decisions regarding finances being made jointly. None of the participants who were married expressed any sort of dissatisfaction with their decision to give a planned gift to Southeastern College. Prior research has indicated that couples who have to compromise and decide between organizations for donations decrease the overall amount of money donated (Andreoni et al., 2003). Many of the participants in this study shared their connection to Southeastern College with their spouse and did not discuss any compromises made regarding their planned gift. Mike described the decision to give a planned gift as one that was related to him and his wife being

good stewards of their money. He laughed as he recalled all of the different ways that he and his wife saved money when they were just married and beginning their life together:

We are very grateful, but we worked hard for all of our married life. And so we struggled financially through those years and still managed to set a little bit aside every month in savings, even when times were so tight we didn't have enough money to last until our next paycheck, and we'd have to pool our resources with another young military couple...But we managed, we strived, we worked hard, but now we're in a position, I think thanks to [Southeastern College]...in a large part, thanks to them. A big part of it too is just being frugal and wise. And being good stewards of our money.

For some participants, the fact that they did not have children or other family members to give their money to upon death was a significant influence to participate in planned giving. They described their decision to give as one that they needed to do in order to keep their affairs in order. Joe said:

Well, in spite of where we are, we live life in a circle, like we are given a lot of things in life, and as we are given things, we've received them, and then it becomes important, especially in last stage of life, it's time to give back and so I have no one else to give it to or whatever... And I've been very fortunate in that regards.

The interview with Tom became emotional when he spoke about children. Tom and his husband were not able to have children when they were younger because they did not live in a state that would allow gay couples to adopt. When speaking with him about their decision to leave a planned gift, he said:

It's sort of like leaving a mark 'cause when we're both gone, there's no more children. We don't have a line of people because the state wouldn't allow it, which is terrible. And now

we could have adopted maybe five or 10 years ago, but I'm not doing that at 50. So the benefits of double income, no kids, it's interesting, but it's not fulfilling sometimes.

Alice said, “because we don't have children, it's so much more important. It's important for anybody that's getting to plan in what they want done, but if you don't have children...” Alice also shared a story about another member of her family who had not prepared for what would happen after they passed away and the impact that it had on her family. She recalled how lost her husband felt when trying to navigate through the process of losing a loved one and then having to take care of many loose ends regarding finances:

My husband's cousin, who was in his 60s, he had life insurance policies and he was well off. Lived in [state] and had a house that was not cheap. [Alice's husband] was his first cousin and his parents were dead and no brothers and sisters, and with all these insurance policies he had left, he had one girlfriend and he had another girlfriend. Well, he died, he fell in his bathroom, he was a diabetic, he just died suddenly, and so I think the first girlfriend was still the beneficiary of his will. I'm not sure how it's all worked out, but...[Alice's husband] had no authority over those or anything. So the thing is, you learn from other people.

This experience motivated Alice to make sure that her family's affairs were in order. After having personal experience with an unexpected death in her family, she saw the importance of planning. Rob spoke of planning as well. He spoke of the control he had over his own finances and how organized that part of his life must be for him to feel confident. The experience that his family had when his mother passed away was not what he wanted his family to experience upon his death:

I'm a planner. I wanna make sure that I can control everything from the grave. I have seen too many donors and family members not plan well, and it's affected me. Because the way my mother's estate went to her husband and he didn't do what he said he would do and his kids got almost all the money. And it's not about the money. My mother's money went to them versus where it should have gone.

Mary also discussed the importance of having one's affairs in order and planning. She said, "I'm looking around and I thought who's going to take care of my business when I'm gone? I got me a notebook and I sat down got an assessment of where my money was and what it was doing."

Mary shared that having her affairs in order was the main motivating reason for her choice to give a planned gift. She said, "I don't know what urges people, other than you're getting your business in order and you look at what you have and how it's gonna be disposed." Tony also saw the importance of planning and said, "I realized that there was coming a time when I wouldn't be able to do everything I wanted to. And so that moved me."

### **Christian Duty**

Others described the duty to give a planned gift as something more spiritually connected with their identity. Five individuals mentioned Christianity as a motivating factor during their interview. Southeastern College is affiliated with a religious denomination, so the connection to a spiritual or Christian duty was a motivation that some participants shared. Participants were involved in their own churches in a variety of ways, and some shared their current denomination with Southeastern College. Participants who spoke of a Christian duty to give also shared their involvement with their church. The Bible, and what it says about giving back, was mentioned in some of these interviews. Alice said, "I think as a Christian, we're called to give, to share with other people. So I think you just find the best way that you can..." Tony expressed a similar

sentiment and said, “I take very seriously the responsibility of giving as a part of living as a Christian, so I want to practice what I preached all those years.” Tony expanded on this statement:

To give, well it's a biblical motivation. I believe strongly that the Bible teaches, to give a 10th whatever you have to some cause that's serving other people. That's a basic motive. I have been given a great deal. I wouldn't, by any means claim to have earned the opportunities I've had... the family, I've been blessed with, the opportunity to serve in the church, the money I have, this place that we live on. I have no claim to have deserved this, I have been the recipient of a great deal, and I'm very grateful for that. So I am motivated to give with the fact that I have been given to, very richly, abundantly and I know that, and I feel a great sense of indebtedness to people in the church and to God for what I have been given. And it would be the height of selfishness not to give something.

James shared a similar motivation with me. He considered his family's motivation to give to be tied with their religious affiliation, involvement with the church, and Southeastern College's connection with the church:

I think I alluded to it earlier, there's a spiritual reason for us. We try to live a good Christian life, and the Lord convicted us a long time ago about generosity, and we were very faithful about trying to live into that, and it seemed like the more we live into it, the more we were blessed by it. So, it comes from a real inner basis of wanting to be generous. It's out of a conviction of being generous, and God calls us to be generous and to give to the point where it's a sacrificial gift. I have never understood how that works because I never felt like I was sacrificing. It gives us a great...very deep blessing that

we're able to give to things that are as close to us, and we trust, we know [Southeastern College], we trust [Southeastern College] with our gifts.

The concept of feeling a sense of Christian duty associated with giving through planned giving is consistent with prior research that suggests affiliate groups often require a specialized strategy from an advancement office in order to secure the donation. Bongila's (2010) research suggested that certain communication strategies used by an advancement office at a Catholic university were more successful than others.

### **Recognition**

As discussed in my limitations section, I thought that it would be unlikely that interview participants would share any self-serving reasons of why they chose to donate through planned giving. However, six participants noted that the recognition they received when they chose to give a planned gift played a role in their motivation to give. This is consistent with research by Kottacz (2003) who suggested that some participants were more highly motivated by an extrinsic factor, such as benefits offered to the donor in return for their donation. In his interview, Bill mentioned several awards or times that he had been publicly recognized throughout his life. He indicated how honored he felt at these times. In addition to his planned gift, Bill had given several physical items to Southeastern College. When discussing his most recent physical gift, which is in the president of Southeastern College's home, he said:

So it's a \$3,500 [item] sitting down there. But it is very sentimental. I've not even seen it, his home, we haven't gone to his home the past few years. That made me feel real good. Haven't asked for any recognition of that either, I guess they knew what it meant to everybody.

Later in his interview, Bill was open about enjoying receiving some sort of recognition, but he noted that it was not the only reason he chose to give a planned gift:

About halfway through doing that after I retired, I realized that I had been doing some of that for recognition, and it didn't sound good to me, but I enjoyed some attention. But after a while, I didn't want to stand out like that, so that changed my whole way of looking at it, that I was not doing it for the recognition, but helping people...

Steve discussed with me his desire to one day be asked to serve on the Board of Trustees.

This is consistent with Harbaugh's (1998) research that discussed prestige motivation which referred to the recognition and public benefits that a donor may receive in return for their donation to an organization. Steve said:

I mean, I would like to be on the Board of Trustees one day. That's something I would be very proud of. I try to give more than the trustees do, so maybe I get asked one day. But I like to be... I'd like to be one of the people in the room...

Some participants also spoke of the recognition they received from students who were enrolled at Southeastern College. Participants shared stories of receiving thank you notes from current students and described them as being meaningful Bill said:

I got a thank you note last week...Her last thing was I want to thank you, I would not have been able to attend [Southeastern College] if it hadn't been for you. I've got those for years now, it's wonderful...it means a lot to me, and I immediately copy it and send it to my sister, too.

James also mentioned the thank you notes that he and his wife had received as a result of their planned gift to Southeastern College. He said, "We love getting these sweet little letters from

students out here thanking us. But it's always sweet to get that and come out here to alumni fairs and lunches and stuff like that.”

Rachel mentioned the recognition she received from her planned gift in the form of having her name listed on various printed items:

Well, you give through money and time. You give yourself in which I have done and wanting to do, and I think you feel more a part of it if part of what you're doing, if it's more than just money. Of course, the institution loves to see the money come in, and I have my name on different things around me saying I gave to it.

Finally, Mike discussed recognition in the form of leaving a lasting legacy in the form of a planned gift. He said, “I’m really proud of this college, that I had, that I made an imprint here somehow and hopefully, hopefully, our legacy will last, you know, and that's why we want.”

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter presented the findings of the study which were acquired through interviews with 17 participants and used the social identity framework to analyze the data. Participants shared their perceptions of their identities through their connection to the college and their motivations to give through planned giving initiatives. They were also able to speak about why they chose to give to Southeastern College, a small college with low student enrollment. Participants articulated specific experiences that they perceived as motivating factors in their decision to give a planned gift.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETATION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I interpret the findings from Chapter 4 while addressing my research questions and ultimately the purpose of this study through the lens of social identity theory. I then discuss recommendations for future research on the topic and practical applications for development officers at colleges and universities. Lastly, I share my reflections on this study and the conclusion of the research.

#### **Research Question 1: What Motivates Donors to Invest in Higher Education through the Philanthropic Initiative of Planned Giving?**

Social identity theory describes how an individual's perception of their membership in various organizations affects their behavior (Tajfel, 1979). An individual's perception of their membership in an organization could differ between different members of the organization. For this study, all of the participants were categorized as planned gift donors by the Southeastern College advancement office. This initial categorization was something that each study participant was aware of; however, during participant interviews their descriptions of themselves did not include this as an identifying characteristic. However, all participants described their connection with Southeastern College at some point in the interview. Study participants were motivated to invest in higher education through the philanthropic initiative of planned giving through their connections to Southeastern College.

I asked participants to tell me about themselves. While there were probing questions included on my interview protocol, all individuals were able to immediately respond to the question without using a probe. I used probes if there was a pause after participants initially introduced themselves. Most often, participants began to tell me about themselves in terms of either their family or the time they spent at Southeastern College. Some participants even linked the topics of their family and their collegiate experience. I used the descriptions participants shared with me to gain a sense of their perceived social identity. All participants described their connection with Southeastern College at some point in the interview.

My interpretation of these data is that a connection with Southeastern College evoked a sense of membership among participants. Viewing the data through the lens of social identity theory allowed me to then interpret the motivations that participants shared as their behavior that was affected due to their membership or connection to Southeastern College. Generally, participants described their motivations through the following themes that emerged through the data: membership through connection, meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition.

Some participants generally felt a sense of indebtedness to Southeastern College. This was represented by the theme of paying it forward. These participants shared a feeling or urge to pay the college back for the experience it had provided them when they were enrolled as students. Donors had positive experiences while they were enrolled. Also, some of these donors had experiences that were specific to them which later influenced their decision to give a planned gift. This finding is consistent with previous research by Worth et al. (2020) who indicated that 60% of mega-gift donors were motivated to give in order to repay for the benefit they had already received from the institution.

Additionally, many donors were motivated by the opportunity to advance the college in some capacity. Donors spoke of helping students, making sure their own degree kept its value, and of helping the college progress. One donor spoke of their specific desire to advance the role that the Student Life office played on campus by designating their gift to assist in future programming. This finding aligns with results by Worth et al. (2020) who suggested that some donors were motivated by the desire to advance a specific cause or the desire to advance a specific organization.

Donors also spoke of their motivation to help students through their discussion of the value of education. Education was important to these donors. Many discussed the importance of education in advancing a person overall as well as society as a whole. The value of education and helping students succeed overall was also seen in the results of a study by Stephenson and Bell (2014) in which 43% of participants donated to help currently enrolled students.

Finally, recognition emerged as a motivating factor for some study participants. As discussed in my limitations section, I thought that it would be unlikely that participants would mention any self-serving reasons for choosing to give a planned gift; however, the data suggested that recognition was a motivating factor for some participants. Some participants recognized that they gave in order to receive some sort of recognition but noted that it was not the only reason they chose to give a planned gift. Recognition meant different things to each donor who mentioned it as a motivating factor during their interview. The motivation of recognition was described as the desire to be recognized for future opportunities at Southeastern College, such as being named as a member of the Board of Trustees. Participants also described this motivation through the appreciation of thank you notes from students. This result is

consistent with previous research by Harbaugh (1998) who indicated that donors were motivated by prestige.

### **Research Question 2: What Motivates Donors to Participate in Planned Giving Philanthropic Initiatives at Small Colleges?**

One of the goals of this research was to learn more about the motivations of planned gift donors, specifically planned gift donors who have chosen to give a planned gift to a smaller college with low enrollment. I believe that much of the findings from this research would translate to a campus with a larger student enrollment. Overall, the themes of: meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition were all motivating factors for donors to give to small colleges.

However, I noted participants emotional responses when they made mention of the size of Southeastern College during the interviews. While participants discussed their hope that the college continued to progress, there were several who also mentioned their hopes for the college to keep traditions. The small college atmosphere was something that participants enjoyed about their experience if they were an alumnus of the institution. They mentioned that at larger institution they believed they would have been *just a number*.

Traditions were important to participants in this study. Participants valued being seen and known as individuals when they were students at Southeastern College. Participants also felt like their gift mattered because of the size of the college. As discussed in Chapter 4, one participant shared that many of the alumni of the college did not have the ability to give back in a large capacity, but that many alumni could make a difference.

### **Research Question 3: What Are Specific Experiences That Donors Describe as Important to Their Decision to Make a Planned Gift?**

I asked participants directly about their motivation to give a planned gift and if they recalled when they first learned about planned giving as an option for them to give philanthropically. The learning experiences for these participants were influential in their decision to give through planned giving. Notably, participant who shared how they first learned of planned giving were also the parties who initiated the planned gift. The staff at Southeastern College, while helpful in the process, did not initiate any of the conversations regarding planned giving with participants.

Participants did not mention actively seeking information regarding planned giving at their jobs. Instead, they followed examples set by their employers or clients. Some participants worked in a career field that provided them with examples of other people who had chosen to give through planned giving. Many of these participants were in the fields of accounting, worked with grants, or were experienced development officers. These participants had hands-on experience with pursuing a planned gift. Other participants knew about planned giving because of the careers of their parents. While some participants described their families as being philanthropists, they did not indicate that their individual families had experience with planned giving.

Another significant experience for study participants was seeing what happened if their affairs were not in order before they passed away through personal family examples. These experiences were difficult for participants and their families. Participants shared stories of family members who died unexpectedly and did not have their financial affairs in order. They recalled the difficulty that this presented for their family when they were already experiencing grief. Many also expressed a desire to make sure that their families did not experience the same

difficulties upon their passing. These types of experiences were catalysts for participants to seek information on giving a planned gift.

Participants also discussed specific experiences connected with their desire to pay it forward. After experiencing the loss of her father, one participant felt that the money he left for her school could not have possibly paid for her entire four years at the college. However, each time she asked what she owed, she was told that she did not owe anything. Regardless of whether or not she had a secret benefactor or if her father's insurance policy paid for her to attend college, this experience was influential to her. This experience influenced her decision to give a planned gift to her alma mater in hopes that she too could make an impact.

### **Implications for Research**

The scope of this qualitative research study was limited to planned gift donors of Southeastern College. In order to build on the findings from this study and further contribute to the general knowledge community about the topic of planned giving, I suggest continued research on the topics listed below.

Since this research was focused on individuals who had chosen to give a planned gift to Southeastern College, I think it would be important in future research to expand the site selection in order to include more institutions in the data collection. This expansion would provide the opportunity to further research the experience of planned gift donors on smaller college campuses. As mentioned previously, the bulk of the research in this area has been on campuses that have a much larger student enrollments, thereby producing more alumni and gaining more recognition from the general public who could be included in the pool of donors. I also think that the research could benefit from a more intensive survey component. There is the possibility that participants would share more about their motivations to give if they were not being asked

questions through an interview. A survey component would give participants a greater sense of anonymity and comfort that interviews simply cannot offer.

Study participants established a type of identity tied to Southeastern College. The idea of membership through connections to the college was discussed in various capacities during interviews. This perception of membership was explained through participants' introduction to the college. In the future, researchers should explore the concept of donor identity to better understand a donor's feelings of connection and membership to an organization.

Participants expressed a desire to give a planned gift in order to thank the college for the experience they had. This *pay it forward* mentality was tied to a sense of indebtedness that participants felt. In the future, researchers should further explore this sense of donor indebtedness.

Study participants expressed both an appreciation for the progress that the college had made and the consistency of some collegiate traditions. This finding suggests that there is a fine line that must be tread by college officials between the change that donors want on campus versus the traditions donors feel are important. In the future, researchers could explore the relationship between progress and tradition in higher education.

Some participants expressed feeling a responsibility or duty to give to the college through planned giving. In the future, researchers could further explore the concept of duty and why donors feel an obligation to give through planned giving. The subtheme of Christian duty emerged in this research, so it would also be beneficial to the research community to explore other types of duty that may be associated with giving motivations. This finding suggests that responsibility is important to donors.

Finally, some study participants expressed an appreciation for the recognition they received when they chose to give a planned gift to the college. Donors described recognition from thank you notes and being invited to the president of the college's home. This wide range of recognition for planned gift donations to the college suggests that future research could be done on different types of incentives and the types of gifts that are commonly associated with them.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on study findings, I was able to identify recommendations to the field of higher education, specifically offices of advancement, to assist with planned giving initiatives for the campus. Since family connection was an important aspect described by participants, advancement officers at institutions of higher education should implement events that include families of donors. Intentional inclusion of these other individuals could create opportunities for further connection to the college for current donors and facilitate an opportunity for new donor connections.

Many study participants were alumni of Southeastern College; however, they did not learn about planned giving from the college. I believe that there is a gap in educating alumni of the college, or more generally, the public that might be interested in giving a planned gift. Participants who were able to recall how they learned about planned giving were able to point to specific learning experiences. These learning experiences were often tied to situations associated with their careers or specific experiences within their families. The educational opportunities that I suggest are tied directly to my second recommendation of providing literature on the topic of planned giving. Practitioners in advancement offices could partner with alumni or college stakeholders to hold workshops. Class gatherings or reunions are an ideal opportunity for staff at

colleges to have information available about the philanthropic initiative of planned giving. Study participants learned about planned giving from their careers or if they experienced difficulty with a family member's will upon their death. There are opportunities to provide this information to potential donors before they experience the negative effects associated with the lack of planning of the deceased's family.

The recommendation of education on the topic of planned giving also extends to staff on the advancement team. Since donors in this study did not solicit information on planned giving from the institution, I believe that there is likely a gap in the information on planned giving connected to staff. It would be important for small colleges to educate their staff on what planned giving is and how to speak with potential donors about the opportunity. Educating staff members on this topic, especially at small colleges that may not have a specific office dedicated to planned giving initiatives, is important so that staff has the ability to speak knowledgably on the topic. Staff should work as a unit to provide donors with any information they need if they reach out to the college for specific details regarding this type of gift. Partnering with alumni or other donors who have experience with financial planning could create partnerships that advancement offices could use to train staff.

While study participants did not seek information on planned giving unless they experienced a situation in which they needed it, I think it would be beneficial for advancement offices to offer information on the opportunity to give a planned gift. All of the participants were the initiators of their planned gift opportunity. The intentionality of donors to pursue planned giving leads to my next recommendation. If the information about planned giving were available online or mailed to them in a yearly mail-out, the number of people who choose to give in this way could potentially rise. I suggest a yearly mail-out to limit the amount of mail sent to donors

on the topic. Intentional information on planned giving provided to donors could be the catalyst that encourages them to learn more about this philanthropic option. This mail-out is also another way for alumni with financial planning experience or stakeholders of the college to be included in the work of advancement offices. These individuals could be asked to contribute an article in a newsletter, advertise a workshop, or market their financial planning services.

A sense of indebtedness was a common feeling among participants. Learning the reasons that individuals feel this way could affect the way advancement officers solicit gifts. Practitioners in the field could adjust their marketing techniques to be consistent with the types of emotions that participants feel. Additionally, emotional ties create more opportunities to connect a person with a cause on campus.

A subtheme that emerged was the value that donors ascribed to receiving an education. Donors saw value in others receiving an education in addition to recognizing the value of their own degree. Advancement officers could partner with other offices on campus to determine the community impact that individuals have upon graduation and use these statistics in marketing materials to show donors how their financial gifts help students achieve success. Donors also expressed an affinity for student life programming on campus. A partnership with Student Affairs offices could create ways for alumni and other college stakeholders to become more involved with current students.

Additionally, advancement officers should map out the types of incentives that are associated with different levels of giving so that they can be consistent. Having a plan to recognize an individual once they make a gift would also ensure that donors are recognized. Students could also be involved in the recognition of donors. Thank you notes from current students or inviting donors to campus to meet the students who are affected by their financial

gifts are other ways that donors can be recognized. Introducing donors to students also increases the connection of the donor to the college.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to gain insight into the motivations of donors when choosing to participate in planned giving philanthropy initiatives at smaller, non-elite institutions of higher education. This study specifically focused on the motivations of donors to participate in the less common philanthropic initiative of planned giving. Using social identity theory as my framework, I sought to explore how an individual's perception of their connection to or membership in various organizations affected their behavior to give a planned gift to a small, non-elite institution of higher education. Study findings suggested that participants' connection with Southeastern College evoked a sense of membership among participants. I described this theme as membership through connection. I interpreted the motivations that participants shared as their behavior which, if viewed through the lens of social identity theory, was due to their membership or connection to Southeastern College. Participants described their motivations through the following themes: member through connection, meaningful personal experience, pay it forward, advancement of the college, duty, and recognition.

Study findings corroborated much of the research that was summarized in the literature review section. Characteristics of study participants were similar to those described in previous research. While the overall themes from the research were consistent with prior research, this study focused on the motivations of donors to give to small colleges. I found that participants valued the traditions that were associated with smaller colleges. Additionally, participants were able to recall specific experiences in which they learned about planned giving through their

careers, a family member's career, or an incident with a loved one who passed away without having their affairs in order.

Study findings may provide guidance and further recommendations for the field of higher education, especially for those in their field of advancement. Future research has the opportunity to expand the goal of this study to focus on planned giving initiatives at small, non-elite colleges and universities. Nevertheless, the present study provides a basis for the growth of knowledge and an expansion to the body of research on planned giving initiatives.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT TOP 20 PRIVATE VOLUNTARY GIFT RECIPIENT INSTITUTIONS IN 2020

| <b>Institution</b>                          | <b>Full-Time Enrollment, Academic Year 2020</b> |
|---|---|
| Brown University                            | 9613  |
| Columbia University in the City of New York | 23803   |
| Cornell University                          | 22975   |
| Dartmouth College                           | 6247  |
| Duke University                             | 15352   |
| Emory University                            | 12729   |
| Harvard University                          | 19030   |
| Johns Hopkins University                    | 14652   |
| Massachusetts Institute of Technology       | 11000   |
| New York University                         | 44047   |
| Northwestern University                     | 17736   |
| Princeton University                        | 7768  |
| Stanford University                         | 14217   |
| University of Chicago                       | 15610   |
| University of Miami                         | 16400   |
| University of Notre Dame                    | 12533   |
| University of Pennsylvania                  | 21785   |
| University of Southern California           | 38607   |
| Washington University in St Louis           | 13204   |
| Yale University                             | 11905   |
|   | 17460.65  |

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project Title- Motivations of Planned Gift Donors: A Qualitative Research Study

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

*Reminders: Describe the interview process. Give an overview of this research project. Explain the purpose of this study. Review the consent form with the interview participant. Test audio feature on phone to ensure it is working properly.*

**Questions:**

1. Tell me about yourself (examples: family, education, institution, community involvement, and career).
2. Tell me about your relationship with the College (are you an alumni, how were you introduced to the college, etc.).
3. Could you describe your involvement with the College (volunteer work, board of trustees members, attendance at any events, etc.)?
4. What motivates you to give?
5. Was giving emphasized in your family? If so, how? What did your parents (or grandparents, relatives) tell you?
6. Can you recall any fundraising materials that you have received from the college, if so what were they?

7. How did you learn about planned giving (financial planner, school official, friend, etc.)?
8. When did you decide to make a planned gift to the College?
  - a. Probe: Do you recall any other events that were taking place in your life during this time?
9. Who else was involved in your decision to make a planned gift to the College (spouse, financial planner, development officer at the college, etc.)?
  - a. Probe: What was each person's role in the decision?
10. Can you recall if you were publicly recognized for making this planned gift?
  - a. Probe: In what ways were you recognized (letter, magazine, phone call, press release, etc.)?
11. What aspects of higher education are important to you (retention, athletics, arts programs, etc.)?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

*Reminders: Ask if the participant has any additional questions. Go over the confidentiality statement. Go over the ember checking timeline. Thank the participant.*

## APPENDIX C

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AMENDMENT



June 21, 2022

To: Kathleen Penney, BA, MS  
Education Policy Center  
Department of Higher Education Admin. & Political Science  
College of Education  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870302

From: Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP [REDACTED]  
Director & Research Compliance Officer

Re: **Notice of Approval**  
IRB Application #: e-Protocol 21-12-5230-A  
Project Title: "Motivations of Planned Gift Donors: A Qualitative Research Study"  
Submission Type: Revision  
Approval Date: June 21, 2022  
Expiration Date: January 18, 2023  
Funding Source: None  
Review Category: EXEMPT  
Approved Documents: Informed Consent

Dear Ms. Penney:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has reviewed the revision to your previously approved exempt protocol. The board has determined that the change does not affect the exempt status of your protocol.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.

All the best with your research.

## APPENDIX D

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



January 19, 2022

Kathleen Penney  
Education Policy Center  
Department of Higher Education Admin. & Political Science  
College of Education  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 21-12-5230: "Motivations of Planned Gift Donors: A Qualitative Research Study"

Dear Ms. Penney:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.104(d)(2) as outlined below:

*(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:*

*(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).*

The approval for your application will lapse on January 18, 2023. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by the University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

**The UA IRB requests that you provide documentation of approval/support from Huntingdon College. Please be aware that any changes requested by Huntingdon College must be incorporated into the UA IRB application.**

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Carpentato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP  
Director & Research Compliance Officer