

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP  
OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO ALUMNI GIVING

by

Amy Jennifer Harrell Hall

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

Community colleges have begun to rely more heavily on private funding sources like alumni donations to support their overall fiscal health. This correlational study tested the theory of planned behavior as it relates to level of engagement through social media for community college alumni and alumni giving behavior for Virginia's community colleges. More specifically, it attempted to determine whether a relationship exists between alumni use of their alma mater's Facebook page and engagement behaviors. Survey data were gathered from participating colleges and from a randomly drawn sample of alumni of Virginia's 23 community colleges (N=4,100) using the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey, an instrument that incorporates the Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure of giving intention. Multiple regression analysis was used to provide insight into the strength of relationships among the variables. While the original null hypothesis could not be rejected at the .05 alpha level, additional analyses revealed statistically significant relationships among the variables, under different conditions, led to the conclusion that consistency of effort in building and maintaining relationships with alumni is vitally important to alumni fundraising programs. Recommendations for further research include repeating the current study under more consistent conditions with broader participation by community colleges, studying alternative forms of engagement – with or without the mitigating factor of social media – in pre-test/post-test format, and utilizing qualitative research methods to provide greater insight into donor motivations in general and alumni giving motivations specifically.

*Keywords:* community college alumni, giving, fundraising, donors, social media, Facebook, alumni engagement strategies

## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my Savior, Lord, and Friend, Jesus Christ. May my

life and work always point others to Him.

I also dedicate this work to my steadfast supporters and fellow travelers on this educational journey, my husband, Dennis, and my children and their spouses, Nikki and Yancey, and Eric

and Teresa

To the one who lights up my life, my granddaughter, Kadance

To my long-time supervisor, friend, and head cheerleader, Jack Lewis

And to my cheering section, Joey, Deborah, Angie, Becky, and Brad

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

For publicly funded institutions of higher education, it has become increasingly difficult to continue to provide adequate learning opportunities and support services in light of the austere fiscal environment that has developed in recent years. For many community colleges, whose funding levels are significantly lower than their four-year counterparts to begin with, these budget reversions have had potentially devastating effects. Tuition increases have been used to offset budget reductions. As the cost of attending college continues to increase and families struggle to find the resources to afford college, state and federal legislators may find themselves pressured to increase federal financial aid. As a result, colleges and universities are likely to be the subjects of political pressure to curtail the cost of a degree. Even now, institutions of higher education in America are facing political pressure to demonstrate the value of the degrees they award, essentially being asked to justify the total investment of money required to earn a college degree (Reaume, 2014).

As a moderating strategy to tuition increases, community colleges have found themselves in the fundraising business. States allocated funds for college budgets; colleges find alternate sources of funding in grants, investments and savings strategies, and private donations (Kaplan, 2015). Private donation is a source of revenue for community colleges that probably has not been tapped to the fullest extent possible. This is especially true when one considers that community college alumni compose one subgroup of potential donors and community colleges have not yet been able to develop and implement robust alumni relations or alumni giving programs (Skari, 2011). In comparison, most four-year institutions of higher education have mature, structured alumni programs that focus on two elements. The first element is an alumni

relations program that provides opportunity for graduates to return to campus for class reunions or athletics events and provides some type of reward system for holding alumni status (discounts, special seating, etc.). The second element is alumni fundraising support. These operations are often self-supporting and are successful in generating gifts from alumni on an annual basis that produce sizable returns on the investment. The success that four-year institutions have experienced with alumni giving has not been replicated in the community college environment (Skari, 2011).

For college leaders, especially presidents and advancement officers, fundraising has become an integral part of the leadership experience. The skills associated with successful fundraising is a relatively new expectation for top-level college leaders (Hodson, 2010). Some argue that as institutions of higher education compete to offer students the best college experience at the lowest tuition rates or the highest level of prestige, fundraising expertise may distinguish the best colleges from the rest of the pack (Lara & Johnson, 2013). For public community colleges, keeping tuition costs low necessitates a change in the basic funding model to include a greater portion from private donations while continuing to seek donations that fund scholarships and build the endowments of their foundations. Successful alumni fundraising campaigns may fill the need if college fundraisers can find the right approaches to solicit alumni contributions (Skari, 2011).

For over 30 years, public institutions of higher education have experienced dwindling funding support (Doyle & Delaney, 2009). In no time, however, has that fiscal decline been more pronounced than in the last five years. Concurrently, the demand for higher education has reached unprecedented levels (Oliff, Mai, & Palacios, 2012). This demand has strained the fiscal resources of institutions of higher education (SOURCE, 2011).

Tuition increases have become the *de facto* method for offsetting budget cuts and for keeping pace with enrollment demands (State Council, 2009). One challenge facing higher education leaders is that of finding new funding streams so that tuition costs can be curtailed and vital services can be provided. Sources of new funds include private donations (such as alumni gifts) and federal grants.

As community colleges have come to rely increasingly on private funding sources like grants and private gifts, alumni donations have become more important to the overall fiscal health of many institutions (Nelson, 2014). Four-year colleges and universities have expansive structures for tapping into alumni dollars (Skari, 2011). The Council for Aid to Education publishes an annual report of voluntary giving in which total giving by individuals is categorized by type of recipient. For 2012, alumni giving to institutions of higher education in the United States accounted for \$7.7 billion, approximately 25% of all giving by individuals (Kaplan, 2013). For 2014, alumni giving increased by 9.4% for a total of \$9.85 billion or approximately 26% of total giving (Kaplan, 2015).

Contrary to their four-year counterparts, community colleges have yet to tap the potential funding potential of their alumni. The Council for Aid to Education annual report indicates that community college alumni donations represent just 1% of giving to institution of higher education (Kaplan, 2015). While a large body of scholarly literature exists regarding giving behaviors (Dvorak & Toubman, 2013; Lara & Johnson, 2013; Skari, 2011), literature related to community college alumni giving is limited. In fact, much of the literature on alumni giving focuses on four-year institutions (Skari, 2011). Community colleges have relatively immature fundraising and alumni engagement programs and, therefore, operate in a unique context.

Federal grants are, likewise, more readily available to senior institutions of higher education, especially those with a research emphasis, than their two-year counterparts. Most federal grantors are interested in funding research projects. Such funding priorities effectively exclude community colleges since these institutions do not offer graduate programs or undergraduate degrees that emphasize scientific research (SOURCE, 2011). To be successful in obtaining grant funds from federal agencies or foundations, colleges and universities must frequently demonstrate need and form partnerships that include other schools or school systems, businesses and industries, and/or local economic development associations.

If institutions of higher education continue to use tuition increases to supplement declining state resources, one serious societal complication could occur: loss of access to higher education for some subset of the population. Dana Hamel, founding chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, points out that when the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) was formed by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1969, the most important goal for the new system of colleges was providing access to those in the communities served who would not otherwise have access to postsecondary learning (D. Hamel, personal communication, May 15, 2014). Access and affordability of a community college education are still found among the strategic goals of the VCCS (VCCS Complete 2021 Plan, 2016).

Logically, it is the middle class that may lose access to an affordable postsecondary education. The poorest students will still have access to ample financial aid to cover costs of tuition and books. Students from wealthy families will continue to use community colleges as a viable transfer option since parents of those students are prepared to pay much higher tuition rates to a four-year institutions eventually. Middle class students, however, will continue to have larger expected family contributions than poorer students, thereby reducing their financial aid

eligibility. According to Jack Lewis, president of New River Community College, many college leaders have become concerned that rising tuition costs may, eventually, be too high for middle class families to afford – even at a community college (J. Lewis, personal communication, September 8, 2014).

To develop comprehensive fundraising programs to attract private donations, including those from alumni, community college leaders will need to understand not only the theories that address giving motivations, but also the methods of soliciting donations that are most effective. Doing so may require an examination of the societal impact of social media (Watulak, 2010).

Facebook is the most popular social medium with over one billion users (Smith, 2014). In one recent study, more than two-thirds of community colleges reported using Facebook to communicate with alumni (Paradise & Heaton, 2013). The ubiquitous nature of mobile devices and social media usage represent an option for rapid and effective communication with prospective donors.

It is, in fact, the recognition of the ease of communication afforded by mobile technologies and social media that contributed to the theoretical framework for this study. If the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) holds true for all prospective donors, then engaging alumni (or other prospective donors) through social media will have no bearing on their intention to donate. However, if relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003) holds true for all prospective donors, then it is only through engaging alumni through their preferred communication platforms that college fundraisers can hope to be successful in raising funds through alumni donations. What remains to be seen, and was tested in this study, is the interaction of the two theories to determine whether relationship management can influence intention or vice versa.

### **Problem Statement**

As the pressure increases to raise funds to supplement budgets of state-supported community colleges, leaders must develop and hone their fundraising skills, and fundraising success depends on the leaders' abilities to understand motivations for giving in order to manage relationships with potential donors, including alumni (Hodson, 2010). Unfortunately, literature related to community college giving is limited (Skari, 2011). For community college leaders, developing alumni relations programs that incorporate fundraising means examining the body of literature related to alumni fundraising in senior institutions of higher education and developing similar practices based on theories that address giving behavior.

When one reviews the body of literature available related to alumni giving, a dichotomous relationship between intention (Ajzen, 1991) and engagement (Ledingham, 2003) appears to emerge. It remains unclear, however, whether the relationship between intention and engagement is truly dichotomous. In other words, it might be possible to influence intention through heightened engagement (Masterson, 2014).

To gain a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to alumni donation behavior, the potential relationship between intention and engagement should be explored. While it is not possible to determine whether intention influences engagement or vice versa, or whether a reciprocal relationship exists at all, it is possible to determine correlation between the two preeminent theories behind giving behavior. The problem is that the relationship between intention and engagement as it relates to fundraising at the community college level is unknown.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this correlational predictive study was to examine the theory of planned behavior as it relates to giving by alumni of Virginia's community colleges. A random sample of 4,000 alumni was drawn from the combined alumni records for 6 of the 23 colleges in the

Virginia Community College System. The predictor variable is engagement. Engagement was defined as an individual's participation in any college-related activity that occurs after his or her graduation (Horseman, 2011). For this study, three engagement practices were examined, individually and collectively, to determine the strength of relationship to the criterion variable. The three engagement practices were registration for a college event, joining the alumni association, and giving any amount to the annual alumni campaign. All three engagement activities were announced and facilitated by the college's Facebook page with unique links for registration, membership application, and donation. The criterion variable is intention, defined as the measure of "how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Intention is central to the theory of planned behavior and is further defined by three contributing factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. To gauge intention for the purposes of this study, one's attitude toward giving to the alma mater is measured by the Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure included in the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is found in its ability to inform fundraising practice in the community college environment. In order for community colleges to create successful alumni fundraising programs, a clearer understanding is needed regarding the effectiveness of alumni engagement practices. A comprehensive understanding of intention, relationship management, and the potential interaction of the underlying theories for those concepts could allow community college leaders to make informed decisions about the use of already limited fiscal resources.

As mentioned previously, research on community college alumni giving is limited, even though a wealth of literature exists related to four-year colleges and universities (Skari, 2011). Because their alumni relations programs are relatively immature, community colleges rely largely on gifts from non-alumni donors to build their endowments (Carter & Duggan, 2010). With limited fiscal resources, community college leaders need some assurance that a return on investment can be realized before infusing fundraising programs with money for expanded operations (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). Such a return on investment may be realized if a predictive model for alumni donation can be crafted. While the scope of this study did not include the creation of a predictive model, data gathered and conclusions drawn from the study should contribute to existing research in a way that is directly relevant to community colleges and their efforts to predict alumni giving.

This study should help resolve the ambiguity between intention and engagement which in turn will provide additional research-based information for community college decision makers in evaluating the degree to which resources should be invested in engagement practices. If the relationship between intention and engagement is a strong one, community college fundraisers have more evidence that engagement practices do indeed lead to donation. On the other hand, a weak relationship between intention and engagement points toward the need for further research in order to understand alumni giving behavior related to each of the two theories.

### **Research Question**

The following research question was explored in the study:

**RQ1:** How accurately can *intention to donate* be predicted from a linear combination of Facebook *engagement* activities (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation

in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni?

### **Null Hypothesis**

To examine the research question, the null hypothesis was:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) and the linear combination of Facebook *engagement* predictor variables (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) for community college alumni.

### **Definitions**

For the purpose of providing clarity to the foregoing description, the following definitions are offered:

1. *Engagement* - Engagement is an individual's participation in any college-related activity that occurs after his or her graduation (Horseman, 2011). Activities include, but are not limited to, attending events, joining the alumni association, making a contribution to the college, following or interacting with the college's social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), and volunteering in some capacity at the college. Generally, the more frequently an alumnus/alumna participates in college-related activities, the more engaged he or she is deemed to be (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Horseman, 2011; Weerts & Ronca, 2008).
2. *Events* - Unlike four-year institutions, most community colleges do not offer events such as homecoming and class reunions. While these programs are successful in the four-year context, community college students tend to develop loyalties based on affinity groups, as opposed to graduating class, and homecoming events are generally connected to athletic competitions, which are insignificant (or non-existent) in community colleges. A reunion

for a specific nursing class might be successful but the largest possible number of attendees would be less than 100 at many colleges. Athletic events occur but do not yield themselves to major accompanying events like homecoming (Skari, 2011). Thus, for the purpose of this study, events are defined as any activity designed to bring alumni to campus that is announced via Facebook for which alumni register through a unique link.

3. *Fundraising campaigns* - Because existing studies indicate that some alumni give only when asked (Bryant et al., 2003; Hoyt, 2004), and prior giving behavior is indicative of future giving (Bekker, 2010; Skari, 2011; van der Linden, 2011), participation in fundraising campaigns was included. Each participating college conducted an alumni fundraising campaign through Facebook. It was not necessary that the campaign be separated from the college's annual campaign or other campaign aimed at alumni. It was necessary, however, that the Facebook portion of the campaign preceded non-Facebook solicitations to ensure that responses through the online giving service, for which a link was provided within the Facebook campaign announcement(s), was used to track alumni donations related to social media.
4. *Intention* - Intention is the measure of "how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Intention is central to the theory of planned behavior and is further defined by three contributing factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. (See Theoretical Framework in Chapter Two for additional information.)
5. *Membership* - The definition of membership is straightforward: a member is any individual who has paid dues or received a free membership in the college's alumni

association (Paradise & Heaton, 2013). In practice, membership in a college's alumni association is offered based on the respective college's definition of alumnus/alumna. Variations exist among Virginia's community colleges; those variations are discussed in chapter 5. For the purposes of this study, however, memberships were counted in connection with a membership drive initiated by the participating colleges through Facebook only and the definition of alumnus/alumna was not considered. Individuals who joined viewed a message about joining the respective college's alumni association through Facebook and joined through a link provided in the same message.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

For publicly funded institutions of higher education, it has become increasingly difficult to continue to provide adequate learning opportunities and support services in light of the austere fiscal environment that has developed in recent years. Not only are states reducing allocations to state-funded institutions of higher education, they are more likely than not to require reversions of allocated funds during a fiscal year in which state revenues experience or are predicted to experience a shortfall. For instance, in Virginia, the Governor has asked institutions of higher education, including the state's 23 community colleges, to prepare to revert 5% of their allocated budgets to the state to cover a projected shortfall for the 2017 fiscal year. In 2010 and 2011, more than one half of the states in U. S. cut budgets in state-funded institutions of higher education (Wilson, 2016).

For community colleges, whose funding levels are significantly lower than their four-year counterparts to begin with, these budget reversions can have devastating effects. Tuition increases can be, and have been, used to offset budget reductions. However, taxpayers are likely to grow weary of the tuition-increase strategy, especially in light of political pressures on colleges and universities to demonstrate the value of its tuition dollars. Specifically, there is increasing pressure at the state and national levels for community colleges to show that students actually graduate or otherwise complete a credential of some sort as evidence of the value of a community college education and the tax dollars associated with that education (Graves, 2011).

As a moderating strategy to tuition increases (among other reasons), community colleges have found themselves in the fundraising business. According to Angela Covey, executive director of the New River Community College Educational Foundation, community colleges in

Virginia created their foundations in the 1980s and began building endowments through private gifts. These gifts came mainly from local business leaders and professionals who contributed money to endow scholarships primarily. Even though some institutions have long utilized private donations and endowment earnings to supplement their college budgets, those supplemental funds were usually earmarked for foundation staff salaries or salary supplements for foundation or college leaders like presidents and executive directors (M. Rowh, personal communication, October 18, 2016). In recent years, some foundation boards have begun to utilize their college's growing endowments for other purposes. For instance, at New River Community College, the foundation board authorized the use of endowment dividends to hire two part-time employees. These employees work in conjunction with two full-time, college-funded positions to perform the administrative functions of the foundation and allow the full-time employees to concentrate more of their individual and joint work hours toward fundraising (A. Covey, personal communication, September 20, 2016).

Furthermore, community college foundation board members and college leaders have only tapped the surface in fundraising for the purpose of maintaining a thriving college. An estimated 9.2% of college innovation and technology purchases were covered by private gifts – usually through the colleges' foundations – in 2009 (Kaplan, 2015). If the current trend of reduced public funding for institutions of higher education continues, colleges are likely to look more and more to the private donor to ensure that the quality of the educational experience they offer is not compromised.

Private donation is a source of revenue for community colleges that has not been tapped to the fullest extent possible. This is especially true when one considers that community college alumni compose one subgroup of potential donors and community colleges have not yet been

able to develop and implement robust alumni relations or alumni giving programs (Skari, 2011). In comparison, most four-year institutions of higher education have mature, structured alumni programs that focus on two elements. The first element is an alumni relations program that provides opportunity for graduates to return to campus for class reunions or athletics events and provide some type of reward system for holding alumni status (discounts, special seating, etc.). The second element is alumni fundraising support. These operations are often self-supporting and are successful in generating gifts from alumni on an annual basis that produce sizable returns on the investment. The success that four-year institutions have experienced with alumni giving has not been replicated in the community college environment (Skari, 2011).

For college leaders, especially presidents and advancement officers, fundraising has become an imperative for college leadership. Fundraising skills are growing in importance for college presidents and other college leaders. Most college leaders have enjoyed a professional path that has prepared them for influencing college constituents in many areas. Fundraising is one notable exception. The fundraising aspect of a college president's job is not well defined and usually is delegated to the college development staff members who, like other college leaders, have had little opportunity to acquire fundraising skills (Hodson, 2010). Yet as the pressure increases to raise funds to supplement budgets of state-supported colleges, leaders must develop and hone their fundraising skills, and fundraising success depends on the leaders' abilities to understand motivations for giving and to manage relationships with potential donors, including college alumni.

Literature related to community college alumni giving is limited. Therefore, to understand community college alumni giving, a review of literature related to giving behaviors in general and, more specifically, to alumni giving at four-year institutions was conducted. Alumni

giving behaviors and fundraising practices at community colleges were studied to the greatest extent possible. The literature review explores both institutional and individual aspects of alumni giving subsequent to offering a theoretical framework explaining why people choose to make such donations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A large body of scholarly literature exists regarding giving behaviors (Dvorak & Toubman, 2013; Lara & Johnson, 2013; Skari, 2011). While a number of theories are offered as support for giving behavior, the majority of literature addressing alumni giving is based in one of two theories: the theory of planned behavior and relationship management theory. In other words, donors act on their intentions or they give to an institution with which they enjoy a valuable relationship. An examination of these two theories will provide a framework for a review of existing literature.

#### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

A number of theories have been offered over time to explain why people decide to make charitable contributions (Emerson, 1976; Batson, 1987; Zhang & Epley, 2009). One such theory – the theory of planned behavior – delves into the idea that actions or behaviors follow intention. According to this theory, behavior is determined by intention and intention is influenced by three underlying constructs: (a) attitude, (b) subjective norms, and (c) perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

Further explanation is needed to understand the aforementioned constructs of intention. According to Ajzen (1991), attitude can best be described as beliefs about the likely outcomes of one's behaviors and how those outcomes might be evaluated by self or by others. Put simply, when one believes that a certain behavior will lead to a desired outcome and feelings of

accomplishment, the accompanying attitude is positive and compels one to action – provided that the other two constructs are also satisfied (Ajzen, 1991).

Subjective norms might be defined as social pressure or normative beliefs. It is through the construct of subjective norms that the expectations of others come to bear on behavior. These expectations can either spur or defer behavior (Ajzen, 1991). For example, if one intends to obey the speed limit and considers the expectation of others to comply with the traffic laws, one is more likely to follow the expected behavior.

Perceived behavioral control is considered to be the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior and the individual's perceived control of these factors. Financial resources, work schedule, and physical health are three such factors. One perceives that control can be exercised over one's behavior when these factors facilitate performance. Conversely, if one perceives one or more factors are outside of one's control – lack of funds or physical disability – he or she may feel that, regardless of intention, performing the task is not possible (Ajzen, 1991).

Subsequent to the introduction of the theory of planned behavior, Beck and Ajzen (1991) found that social norms add to the predictive strength of the theory. In 2007, Smith and McSweeney found that the mere perception that significant others approve of the behavior does not necessarily mean that one feels socially pressured to engage in that behavior. In other words, social norms are not strong enough to motivate action. However, social norms can serve as an important additional predictor of behavior, especially in the context of pro-social behaviors such as donating (Smith & McSweeney, 2007).

Twenty years after the introduction of the theory of planned behavior and subsequent to the Smith & McSweeney (2007) study, van der Linden (2011) explored the predictive validity of

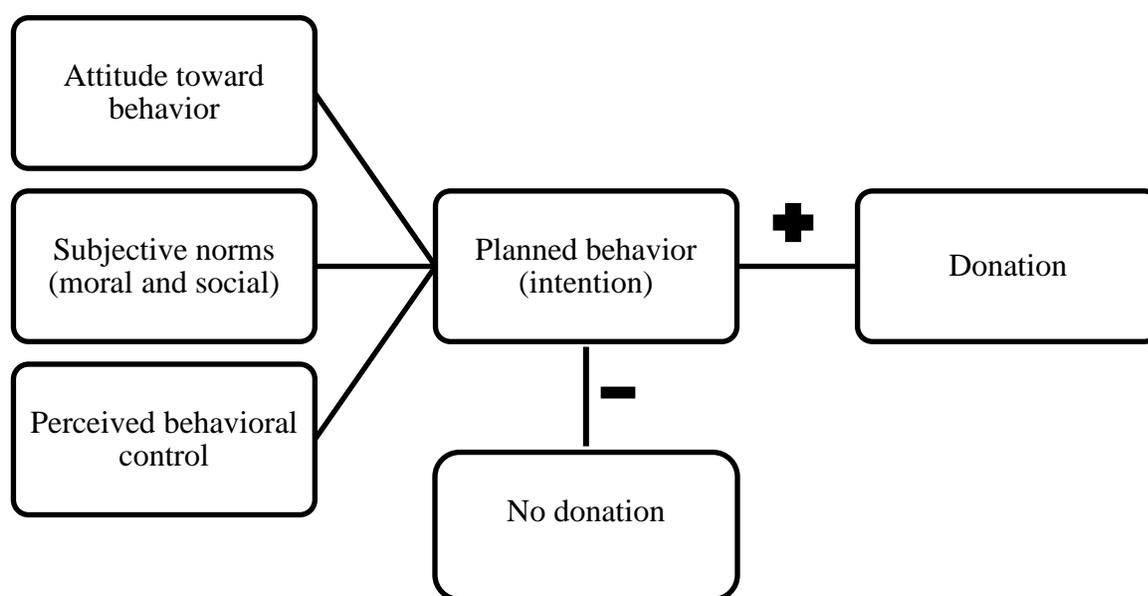
moral norms. Unlike social norms which are rooted in the approval or disapproval of others, moral norms are those that rest within one's own character and worldview. These norms may have been formed within a set of family values or through religious training or through personal spiritual development. Regardless of their source, they are distinctly inherent in the individual and separate from social norms (van der Linden, 2011).

Hypothesizing that feelings of compassion and empathy coupled with one's discernment of the right thing to do will trump any perceived social pressure, van der Linden (2011) used hierarchical multiple regression to analyze the predictive strength of the three constructs of the theory of planned behavior – attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioral control – as well as moral norms and past donating behavior on charitable giving intentions. The results demonstrated that moral norms had much stronger predictive value than social norms. In fact, the construct of moral norms was found to be a stronger predictor than either attitude or perceived behavioral control. However, there was no evidence in the study to minimize or negate the value of any single construct as a contributing factor. As a result of the study, the researcher concluded that an individual's intention to donate increases when one's attitude and perception of control are favorable, when one has a strong feeling of personal responsibility, and when the behavior has been performed previously (van der Linden, 2011).

Knowles, Hyde and White (2012) validated the extended theory of planned behavior. The researchers found that the extended theory was able to explain 61% of the variance in their study of young people's intentions for donating money to charitable organizations.

The implications of the theory of planned behavior on the understanding of alumni donors are important. Given a sufficient degree of actual control over the behavior, people will choose to act on their intentions when those intentions conform to social norms (Ajzen, 1991). If

the theory of planned behavior held true in all cases, alumni donors would be those who (1) intend to give back to their alma maters, (2) believe that their donation will be positively received by important people in their lives, (3) feel that donating is the right thing to do, (4) have the means to make a donation, and (5) have made donations in the past (Ajzen, 1991; Smith & McSweeney, 2007; van der Linden, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the theory of planned behavior as it applies to donor behavior.



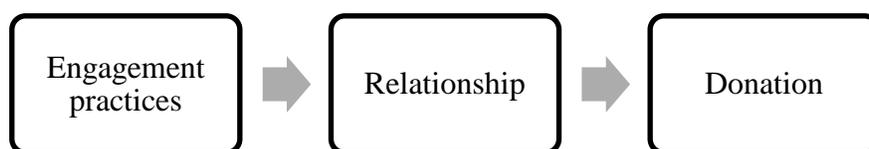
*Figure 1.* Theory of planned behavior in the decision-making process of donors

### **Relationship Management Theory**

While a substantial amount of current literature related to alumni giving supports the theory of planned behavior, or one of its underlying constructs, much of the remaining literature points to alumni engagement with their alma maters as an explanation for giving behavior (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Moon & Azizi, 2013; Moore & Lay-Hwa, 2012). In essence, colleges and universities must strive to engage their alumni and keep the level of engagement high. A

relatively new theory – relationship management theory -- supports the construct of alumni engagement.

Extracted from public relations practice and social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), relationship management theory is defined as follows: “Effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics” (Ledingham, 2003, p. 190). The theory places emphasis on Ajzen’s (1991) construct of social norms by creating a pool of social pressure to pursue goals that are shared by the members of a given community. In terms of alumni donations, the theory has implications for fundraising practice: cultivate relationships with prospective donors so that they will help their alma mater – and other members of the college’s community – pursue and achieve fundraising goals (Moore & Lay-Hwa, 2012; Waters, 2008; Wong & Wong, 2012). Figure 2 illustrates the concept of behavioral management theory applied to alumni donation as it is described in extant literature.

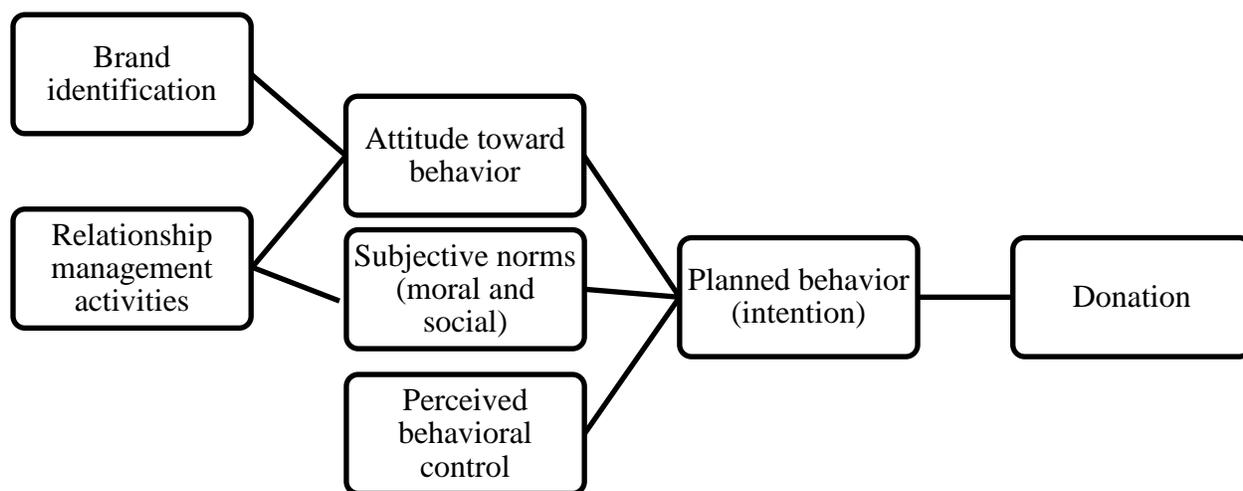


*Figure 2.* Theory of relationship management applied to donor behavior

Sufficient evidence exists in relevant literature to support the construct of relationship to fundraising success with college alumni donors, as discussed below. In fact, some literature seems to support the idea that relationship management fully explains the motivations of donors (Eddy, 2013; Waters, 2008; Wong & Wong, 2012). Other factors that contribute to fundraising success are attributed to luck; the institution has no control over age, education level, and other personal characteristics that are correlated with alumni donation (Lara & Johnson, 2013; Skari,

2011). However, because there are non-donors who possess the same personal characteristics as donors, relationship management theory may play an important role in motivating donors (Waters, 2008).

Relationship management may support the role of the social norms construct within the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, Stephenson and Yerger (2013) found that some engagement activities and brand identification have a bearing on the attitude toward the giving behavior construct. Two of the three major elements of the theory of planned behavior may be influence – positively or negatively – by actions that are aimed at managing relationships. Thus, the two theories – planned behavior and relationship management – may not be fully independent. One potential intersection of the two theories is illustrated in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Intersection of the theories of planned behavior and relationship management

### **Literature on Alumni Giving**

Current literature on alumni giving crosses five broad categories: institutional factors, fundraising practices, demographics, student experience, and alumni engagement. Institutional factors include wealth, prestige, and other characteristics that correlate with alumni giving. Demographics are those personal characteristics most likely to be found in alumni donors. Both

categories – institutional factors and demographics – are not easily manipulated by the fundraiser (college).

Student experience factors include activities that served to engage students during their enrollment at the institution as well as relationships developed with faculty, staff, and peers. Finally, the fundraising practices and alumni engagement categories include factors that are fully within the control of the institution and, therefore, are most relevant for practice.

### **Institutional Factors**

A large body of research examines the characteristics of the institution that support alumni giving. The prevailing characteristics mentioned are wealth, prestige, presidential support, and budget.

**Wealth.** Some research suggests that the more wealth a college has accumulated, the more success it will realize from its fundraising efforts. College wealth is influenced by the number of donors, the size of donations and endowments, and the maturity of its fundraising program, including the college's alumni program (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Skari, 2011). However, other studies suggest that greater wealth does not necessarily result in increased alumni giving (Skari, 2011; Terry & Macy, 2007). Since many economic factors influence institutional wealth (Doyle & Dulaney, 2009), it would be unrealistic for colleges to concentrate on improving wealth in order to increase private donations.

**Prestige.** Institutional prestige can be derived from its wealth or endowment size, outstanding athletic programs, highly selective admissions requirements, academic performance of its students, or significant numbers of notable alumni – all of which have been identified as indicative of supporting alumni giving (Holmes, 2009; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; McDearmon,

2010). As suggested earlier, wealth begets wealth; however, institutions are rarely able to increase wealth for the purpose of influencing alumni donation.

When prestige is associated with athletics, the research is mixed. Some studies indicate that outstanding athletic programs show a positive correlation with alumni giving (Tsiotsou, 2004) while others suggest that there is no such relationship (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006). In a similar way, academic performance of students may (Baade & Sundberg, 1996) or may not (Clotfelter, 2001) be correlated to alumni giving. These conflicting results indicate that, like institutional wealth, prestige factors are not reliable predictors of alumni donation.

**Budget.** An examination of the history of college and university funding illustrates the importance of college budget to the institution's general fundraising plan. While appropriations for public institutions of higher education have been subjected to drastic increases and decreases in short periods of time over the last 40 years, a decidedly downward trend is documented. In the years of the Great Recession – roughly 2008 to the present -- drastic cuts imposed on institutions of higher education rival those that occurred during the 1960s (Doyle & Delaney, 2009).

Such drastic funding reductions may be leveled at higher education institutions for one simple reason: they are able to collect their own revenues through tuition. The cycle of budget reductions paired with tuition increases became pronounced in the 1990s. Since that time, institutions of higher education have become organizations funded by three main parties: students, states, and donations. During this same time period, institutions have begun to experience political pressure to curtail tuition increases, thereby placing more emphasis on institutions' efforts to raise funds for operations through private sources (Doyle & Delaney, 2009).

Community colleges are in a precarious position in the current funding environment. The reason is a straightforward one: community colleges have not developed the same fundraising capacity as that of their four-year counterparts. In fact, private giving in the community college accounts for only one or two pennies on each dollar raised by senior institutions. On the average, four-year institutions are able to leverage donations, grants, and investment returns at more than 100 times that of community colleges (Kreisel & Patterson, 2013). It is imperative, then, that community colleges develop, implement, and maintain fundraising programs that will contribute to the long-term fiscal health of the institutions. Community colleges that develop thriving alumni relations programs are those that maintain an operating budget and staffing for that purpose. Many colleges have no such budget or program. Among those colleges that do, the annual amount set aside for alumni relations is slightly more than \$20,000 (Kreisel & Patterson, 2013).

College budgets are, of course, related to college wealth. The foregoing discussion about the role of institutional wealth to fundraising is pertinent to budget as an institutional factor. Absent an adequate budget for alumni relations, it seems unlikely that any college will be successful in soliciting alumni donations.

### **Fundraising Practices**

Some studies of alumni giving have examined the fundraising tactics employed by an institution to identify which parts of the overall fundraising program are most successful in obtaining donations. Fundraising, in general, may serve to engage alumni since, at a minimum, it increases communication between the institution and the graduate. However, fundraising practices should be examined uniquely since it is also possible that solicitations for funds may have a disengaging effect on potential alumni donors.

**Events.** Four-year colleges and universities frequently host events for alumni to reconnect with their alma maters. These events include, but are not limited to, class reunions and athletic events, and are designed to build a community of engaged alumni. Some studies have shown that participation in such events increases the likelihood of a financial gift (Skari & Ullman, 2012; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Tsiotsou, 2004). Additional research has shown that frequency increases the likelihood of giving (Tsao & Coll, 2005). When alumni return to the campus of their alma mater, feelings of nostalgia or a sense of fulfillment with a network of alumni lead to acts of generosity (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008).

Rau and Erwin (2015) found that the “impact of being invited to events predicted donor behavior best” (p. 109) and that engaging alumni is an important activity for motivating alumni to give. Furthermore, they found that students who were involved and invested in the institution, if engaged as alumni, would likely become donors. Colleges and universities should look for ways to cater to alumni interests based on their involvement as former students. An invitation to alumni event does not create a meaningful connection; however, connecting an alumni program to affinity group, academic program, or other activity with which the alumnus/alumna was formerly involved could then spur donation (Rau & Erwin, 2015).

**Communications.** Fundraising programs necessitate communication with potential donors – alumni and non-alumni alike. It is important that any examination of communications with alumni for fundraising purposes be distinguished from other types of communication, insomuch that such a distinction is possible. Farrow and Yuan (2011) found that frequent communication is necessary for engaging alumni at high levels, regardless of the content or medium used to communicate. This is an important finding since much communication with alumni contains solicitations or appeals for donations. Extant research suggests that online

communications (Farrow & Yuan, 2011), alumni magazines (Levine, 2008), and contact with faculty and staff (Hoyt, 2004) all serve to increase alumni giving.

**Solicitation.** While frequent communication tends to increase alumni giving, frequent appeals or solicitations for funds do not (Levine, 2008). This finding has important implications for practice. Alumni who want to stay connected with their alma maters may welcome frequent communication. However, if the communication always contains a solicitation for funds, positive feelings associated with the institution may wane, even to the point of resentment.

When solicitations for funds are successful, it is often because the institution has made a compelling case for a specific cause to which the potential donor can connect emotionally (Cryder, Loewenstein, & Scheines, 2013). Individuals may not donate to a building program at the college but will donate to a scholarship fund that benefits students with whom they can identify. For example, a graduate who dropped out of high school and earned a general equivalency diploma (GED) before entering college may be inclined to donate to scholarship programs for others who enter college from a GED program. Moreover, those alumni who respond to such compelling appeals are more likely to make larger donations than those who make no such connection and, more often than not, are male alumni (Durango-Cohen, Torres, & Durango-Cohen, 2013; Dvorak & Toubman, 2013).

On the other hand, some studies have suggested that people sometimes give simply because they were asked (Bryant et al., 2003; Hoyt, 2004). Therefore, it remains unclear what effect solicitation has on alumni giving.

### **Models of Fundraising**

Going beyond the unique constructs of fundraising efforts to examine models for effective alumni fundraising, extant literature seems to describe four assumptions underpinning

such models. (While the development of an alumni fundraising model goes beyond the scope of this study, it should be considered as an ultimate goal of advancement professionals making use of this and other studies.) Alumni donation models attempt to assess the strength of (a) student experience, (b) alumni experience, (c) alumni motivation, and (d) demographics in order to identify those graduates of the institution most likely to become donors. A discussion of the literature related to each of these assumptions follows.

**Student experience.** Drezner (2011) asserted that the student experience should be considered when communicating with alumni. It seems reasonable to begin with student experience. After all, one's sense of loyalty to an alma mater begins while enrolled at the institution – not subsequent to graduation. Thus, advancement professionals assume that alumni who had positive student experiences are more likely to donate to their alma maters.

All students connect with their institution at some level. Existing literature strongly suggests that higher levels of student engagement lead to higher levels of alumni engagement (Skari, 2011; Sun et al., 2007). Student engagement has been defined as a combination of academic challenge, collaborative learning, and skill development (Tison, Bateman & Culver, 2011) and as “the quality of a student’s connection or involvement with the endeavor of schooling” (Skinner, Kinderman & Furrer, 2008). No doubt, further review of the literature would provide additional definitions. Even if one narrowed down or chose a single definition of student engagement, can the assumption be made that alumni engagement is similarly defined? Would a definition of alumni engagement, for example, include challenge, collaboration, and skill development? Would such a definition include quality of connections to the school (college or university)?

It is interesting to note that the quality of instruction and direct learning activities does not correlate with high levels of satisfaction with students' experiences. Rather, two specific elements of student experience have emerged as potential drivers of alumni giving: involvement in college activities and relationships with faculty and staff.

***Involvement.*** Students who become involved in extracurricular activities in college avail themselves of additional learning opportunities, as well as opportunities to build relationships with faculty, staff and other students. Not only are students able to find the social support they need for success in college, they become part of a community (Skari, 2011).

As any college graduate can attest, opportunities to become involved in activities are nearly limitless. Some of the options include athletics, clubs and organizations, student government, Greek life, and fundraising – all of which increase the likelihood that students will become donors (Holmes, 2009; Hoyt, 2004; Meer & Rosen, 2007; Monks, 2003; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). In fact, some studies suggest that the strongest predictor of future giving is student participation in soliciting gifts for the college (Holmes, 2009; Hoyt, 2004).

***Relationships.*** Involvement builds relationships, as mentioned above. It is, however, possible for students to build relationships with faculty and staff without high levels of involvement in extracurricular activities. Thus, while there is a connection between involvement and relationship, these concepts should be examined separately.

There is a significant amount of empirical evidence that the student-faculty connection is an important one in determining alumni giving behavior (Clotfelter, 2001; Monks, 2003; Sun et al., 2007). Skari (2011) found that the presence of key relationships with faculty was a strong predictor of alumni giving behavior.

**Alumni experience.** Some researchers have concluded that a positive student experience – or the combination of involvement and relationships -- builds loyalty and feelings of goodwill toward the institution, thereby contributing to giving decisions (Clotfelter, 2001; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). However, Weerts and Ronca (2009) discovered that student experience alone was not sufficient to drive giving behavior; other drivers – such as alumni engagement – must be coupled with student experience.

Some studies have revealed that a positive alumni experience has a strong relationship to giving (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Lertputtarak & Supitchayangkool, 2014; Stephenson & Bell, 2014). In predictive models, alumni experience is often measured in terms of engagement. In other words, those alumni who are more engaged with their alma maters are assessed as having positive alumni experiences and, therefore, more likely to donate. Generally, the common forms for engaging alumni include communication, events, and membership in the college's alumni association (Skari, 2011; Sun et. al, 2007).

**Communication.** Engagement has been defined, in part, as alumni utilization of an institution's communication vehicles, such as the alumni magazine, newsletter, annual reports, and donation appeal letters (Levine, 2008). Frequency and quality of communication with college alumni is believed to enhance engagement (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Levine, 2008). Once an individual has graduated, continued engagement with the college lies primarily with the institution's alumni relations program or alumni association. Such programs vary as widely as the colleges themselves, and colleges utilize various forms and media for communicating with alumni members. Recent literature reveals emerging best practices in the use of social media, as opposed to more traditional forms of communication (Farrow & Yuan, 2011).

In general, frequency of communication plays a stronger role in engaging alumni than any single form of communication (Farrow & Yuan, 2011). For instance, more frequent distribution of the alumni magazine has been more strongly positively correlated to alumni giving than the existence of the magazine itself as a benefit, or the quality of the publication. Similar results have been found for other communication vehicles. Alumni appear to be more engaged with their alma maters when communication is frequent, regardless of the form of communication that is used (Levine, 2008).

*Other engagement factors.* Communication alone is not sufficient as a definition of alumni engagement. Engagement has also been defined by the activities in which alumni participate, such as membership in the alumni association and maintaining frequent contact with the faculty, staff or fellow alumni (Sun et al., 2007). Other methods for engaging alumni include events (such as class reunions), athletics, and service on a college board or advisory body, to name a few. However, provided that the college's overall fundraising practices are mature and adequately funded, as discussed above, the resources invested in engaging, achieving, and maintaining high levels of alumni engagement appear to be well spent (Hoyt, 2004; Tsiotsou, 2004).

In terms of defining alumni engagement, McDearmon (2013) found that expectations of someone in a role can lead the individual in the role to act out certain expected behaviors. Where alumni are concerned, both institutional expectations and social expectations seem to come into play. Institutions cultivate expectations of alumni while those individuals are still students. Skari (2011) found that a positive student experience led to a greater likelihood of donation. This finding, and others like it (Lertputtarak & Supitchayangkool, 2014; Newman & Petrosko, 2011; Sun et al., 2007), suggest that the timing of building a relationship is important. To be

most effective, the engagement of alumni grows out of the positive relationships built while those prospective donors were still students. In the broader context, student engagement supports retention and completion – the creation of alumni, so to speak – and serves as the basis for alumni engagement – or the creation of alumni donors (Skari, 2011).

McDearmon (2013) found that those who experience greater social expectations towards being an alumnus/alumna are more likely to act out those behaviors that are expected of alumni. Social expectations come from family, friends, or peers, some of whom are alumni of the same institution. It is possible, even likely, that these expectations begin to be articulated during the student experience – long before the individual can be defined as an alumnus/alumna. Thus, one must consider the foregoing arguments regarding student experience as part of the overall set of expectations that shape alumni behavior.

**Alumni motivation.** The third underlying assumption of many fundraising models is that alumni are somehow motivated to donate to their alma maters. Whether such motivations are internal or external or both, predictive models use activities such as volunteering or community service to measure motivation to donate. For example, alumni who serve as board members for non-profit organizations in the community are considered, in these predictive models, as motivated to give (Weerts & Ronca, 2008).

The concept of alumni motivation takes on a broader meaning when one considers the theoretical framework of the current study. Examined within the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), alumni motivation might be defined as a combination of the three elements of the theory: attitude toward the behavior, subjective (social and moral) norms, and perceived behavioral control. For example, an alumnus/alumna may be motivated to give when he or she has a positive attitude toward making a donation to his or her alma mater, believes that other

alumni, as well as family and friends, would approve of such a donation, and is able to afford to make a donation. That same alumnus/alumna may be described as motivated to give but could also be described as having met the conditions of the theory of planned behavior. To take the example a step further, the alumnus/alumna may have a positive attitude toward giving because he or she had positive student and alumni experiences and volunteers in the community.

The other element of the theoretical framework – relationship management theory – is also relevant to alumni motivation. Since colleges seek to manage relationships with their alumni through communications, alumni association membership perks, and special events, to name a few ways, it is reasonable to assume that the value of the relationship grows to a point that alumni become motivated to give back to the institution that has done much for them.

Alumni motivation and how it is measured in fundraising models is an idea that lies at the heart of the current study. When one seeks to determine what makes community college alumni donate money to their respective colleges, one is actually examining motivation.

**Demographics.** A substantial amount of research exists which explores the personal characteristics or demographics of alumni donors. In many of those studies, significant correlations to donation are found to exist in factors like age, gender, and proximity of the donor's residence to his or her alma mater (Skari, 2011). Several characteristics identified in the literature and utilized in predictive models are discussed below.

*Income, employment and financial factors.* It seems logical that individuals and households with higher income levels would donate more frequently and at higher levels than lower-income households. Wealthier alumni are more likely to donate (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter, Kang, & Tax, 2003; Okunade & Berl, 1997). In fact, the likelihood of donation increases dramatically when household income reaches the level of

\$60,000 or higher annually (van der Linden, 2011; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Since income usually stems from one's employment, a similarly strong correlation is found in some studies between employment and giving. Employed alumni are more likely to be donors (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Furthermore, high wage earners are more likely to give back to their alma maters (Okunade & Berl, 1997).

While income level and tax relief for charitable contributions are among the determinants of giving behavior, these factors lie outside the control of institutions seeking such contributions (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007). In other words, colleges cannot rely on wealthy alumni to give simply because they are able to do so. Furthermore, because income is not a sole determinant of giving, other demographic (and non-demographic) factors must be considered.

It is interesting to note that certain financial factors have little to no predictive value for alumni giving behavior (Holmes, 2009). Individuals who benefitted from financial aid as students, for example, are not more likely to become donors, nor are those who received extensive financial assistance as students (Meer & Rosen, 2012). On the other hand, alumni are more likely to give to their alma maters when those institutions provide programs and services that help alumni maintain their financial status. Such programs include career services – job placement, assistance with writing resumes, and the like – and fundraising programs that provide specific targets. For example, alumni who give want to know that their money is being used for a specific, laudable purpose – that their donations are helping to solve a specific problem – and the amount requested is specific and reasonable (McDearmon, 2010). While higher-income alumni are more likely to give, one might conclude that they may not do so unless they are able to determine a specific value associated with the gift.

*Residence.* Generally, an individual's place of residence influences the likelihood of charitable donation. Some research has shown that individuals who live in close proximity to their alma maters are more likely to donate to that institution (Holmes, 2009; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009), while other studies have found that the opposite is true (Lara & Johnson, 2013). Likewise, alumni donors who live in wealthy neighborhoods have been found more likely to give in some studies (Holmes, 2009), while in others, a negative correlation was found between living in a wealthy neighborhood and donation to one's alma mater (Dowd & Grant, 2007). Tsao and Coll (2005) found only one factor related to residence for which no contrary evidence has been found: alumni living in metropolitan areas (cities with populations greater than 100,000) have a tendency to give more regardless of the wealth of the community.

*Prior giving.* Conclusive evidence is found in the literature which identifies alumni donors as those individuals who have some history of giving to charitable causes (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Okunade & Berl, 1997; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). In other words, past giving behavior has been shown to be a determinant of future and consistent giving (Bekkers, 2010; van der Linden, 2011). What remains inconclusive is whether alumni donors with a history of giving to charitable causes donate to their community colleges if they transfer to a four-year college or university. A common belief is that community college alumni who transfer to a four-year institution transfer their loyalty to the senior institution (Skari, 2011). Prior giving behavior may or may not be a predictor for giving in those cases.

*Age.* Generally, older alumni are more likely to donate than their younger counterparts. While life stage may be important in one's decision to give (Bryant et al., 2003), it is also possible that older alumni have higher incomes, more accumulated wealth, or fulfill some other correlate to alumni giving. Younger alumni may have little or no history of charitable giving,

lower incomes, and more competing interests for their limited financial resources – such as educational loans or young families to be supported.

McAlexander, Koenig, and DuFault (2016) compared millennials and baby boomers with regard to likelihood of donation. Specifically, the researchers were curious as to whether one's affinity to one's alma mater fades over time, and if market segmentation strategies could be utilized to target likely donors. The results of the study indicated that when considering a donation in the immediate or near future, the older age group was more likely to respond affirmatively. The reverse was true when asked to consider participation in some university event such as lectures, athletic games, or even volunteering in some capacity. In those circumstances, the younger cohort was more likely to respond favorably. The authors believed the results were indicative of natural life events. Older alumni are more likely to be able to give and may have already made plans to bequeath something of value to their alma maters. Younger alumni are more likely to prefer to remain engaged with the institution through activities (McAlexander et. al, 2016).

*Race.* With the exception of historically-black institutions, the majority of alumni donors are Caucasian. Two potential explanations for the rarity of minority donors have been offered. First, the historical disenfranchisement of blacks and other minorities from higher education may have led to their choosing other charitable organizations based on perception of mutual benefit. Second, the limitation on the number of minorities with access to higher education means that the pool of donors of color is much smaller than that of Caucasians (Bryant et al., 2003; Meer & Rosen, 2007). Since community colleges have open admissions policies, it is possible that minorities are present in larger percentages than in four-year institutions. Therefore, race as a determinant of community college alumni giving represents unexplored territory.

*Gender.* In comparison to race, gender is a much weaker predictor of alumni giving. Some studies have shown that males are more likely donors (Clotfelter, 2001; Monks, 2003), while others revealed a stronger correlation to giving for females (Bryant et al., 2003; Holmes, 2009, Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007). To further complicate matters, other studies show no correlation at all between gender and giving (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Okunade, 1993; Tsao & Coll, 2005). The variance of the findings may be based on the differences in men's and women's motivations or in the way a solicitation for funds appeals, or does not appeal, to one gender over the other. Regardless of the reasons, gender is not a conclusive determinant of alumni giving.

*Family status.* For the purposes of discussing alumni giving literature, family status refers to two specific life conditions: marital status and parenthood. In both cases, correlations exist but with inconclusive results. Mixed results are found for marital status. Some studies show that marriage does not predict giving (Okunade, 1993; Tsao & Coll, 2005); other studies indicate that married alumni are more likely to give (Bryant et al., 2003; Holmes, 2009). Alumni with children are more likely to give (Meer & Rosen, 2007) and as the children age, that likelihood increases. Perhaps parents' anticipation of the college careers of their own children motivates them to donate (Okunade, 1993).

*Education.* Obviously, college alumni are those individuals who have completed some level of higher education. Research shows that as individuals gain more education, they are more likely to become donors to their alma maters (Bryant et al., 2003; Weerts & Ronca, 2009). What remains unclear is to which institutions alumni give when they have completed multiple degrees. Some research indicates that the first institution from which an individual graduates is the benefactor of his or her donations (Clotfelter, 2001); others suggest that donations are

directed to the institution with which the individual remains closely engaged (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003).

Taken as a set of characteristics, demographics can provide some predictive value for alumni giving. The strength of those factors as determinants of giving, however, is mixed. Furthermore, while demographics may help colleges identify potential donors, there is little value to fundraising practice since these factors cannot be influenced by the college.

### **History of Community Colleges**

In the United States, community colleges have been around for a little more than 100 years. Most historians date the founding of the first incarnation of the modern community college as 1901, when Joliet Junior College was opened in Illinois. The president of the University of Chicago, at that time, William Rainey Harper, was influential in the founding of the oldest public junior (or community) college in the nation (Vaughn, 2006). The roots of the community college movement, however, can be dated to the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862. This landmark piece of legislation emphasized agriculture and mechanical arts education. Often referred to as the Land Grant Act, Morrill changed the way higher education was viewed in the United States by setting forth an expectation of new types of courses and admission for new categories of students. The second Morrill Act, passed in 1890, withheld funds from any state that refused admission to the land grant colleges based on race unless those states provided separate institutions for minorities (Vaughn, 2006).

About the time that Joliet Junior College was founded, America was facing a unique set of challenges. Global economic competition was on the rise and the need to educate the nation's workforce seemed to offer the country its only real hope for continued economic growth and strength. Thus, a dramatic increase was noted in college enrollment at that time. Even so, nearly

75% of the nation high school graduates at the time still did not choose to further their educations, often because there were no colleges near their homes and they were reluctant to leave the families that relied on their practical and financial support. At the same time, public high schools were expanding their services to their local citizens. Most commonly, these schools were implementing programs to educate new teachers, but they were also adding what would come to be known as vocational education programs (Patton, 2000).

Growth of community and junior colleges was slow at first. By 1914, there were only 14 public junior colleges and 32 private junior colleges. But several social pressures were aligning to bolster the community college movement. Workers needed to be trained to operate the nationally expanding industries. At the same time, young men and women were remaining in secondary school longer and, therefore, the average age of an individual entering the workforce was increasing. Education was perceived as a means of upward mobility and of building a responsible citizenry. Thus, a national desire for social equality could also be considered a driving force in the growth of a higher education system accessible by the common man (Drury, 2003).

It is interesting to note that religion also played a role in the development of a system of junior colleges. In the early twentieth century, more than half of the junior colleges were affiliated with some church denomination. Even so, curricula in these colleges, like those that were not affiliated with a religious organization, mainly emphasized liberal arts in preparing for higher education with a few colleges offering technical programs (Drury, 2003).

The modern comprehensive community college evolved from taking elements of these and other early efforts to make higher education affordable and accessible. For example, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, small private colleges were known for small classes, strong

personal relationships between students and their faculty, and programs of study that included extracurricular activities like athletics, student newspapers, student government bodies, and fine arts programs (Patton, 2000).

Community colleges in the United States became known for their diversity early in their history because of their open admissions policies. Community colleges and other two-year institutions became the gateway to four-year colleges and universities for women and minorities (Kennedy, 2015). In fact, community colleges played a significant role in the education of teachers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 1920s and 30s, junior and community colleges – especially those created as extensions of public high schools – were the primary venue for the preparation of K-8 teachers since, at the time, they were not required to hold baccalaureate degrees. In fact, it was not uncommon for more than half of a community college's student body to consist of young women preparing for the teaching profession (Patton, 2000).

After World War II, community colleges helped ease the American economic shift from military industries to consumer goods, thereby helping students find new jobs at the same time that the original GI Bill created additional educational options for returning veterans. Then, in 1948, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of publicly-funded community colleges. While state and national networks of community colleges were not formed until the 1960s, as baby boomers reached college age, the number of community colleges grew to about 450 nationwide when the first national network was formed. By the turn of the next century, there were nearly 1,400 community colleges in the United States and most states have formed their own networks (Patton, 2000). Enrollment in community colleges experienced rapid growth in the 1960s and 1970s, reaching 4.5 million nationwide by 1980 (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Community colleges have become known for their rapid response to technological growth. As businesses and industries adopt new hardware and software, community colleges create and offer courses for training the workforce to use those technologies. Furthermore, to fulfill the expectations of the citizens in the communities they serve, colleges began offering non-credit courses for personal satisfaction as well as non-academic services like fine arts exhibits and musical performances by the 1970s. Once viewed as ancillary to the traditional general and vocational education paths offered by community colleges, continuing education courses (later known as non-credit instruction and workforce development) have become central to the mission of the comprehensive community college (Ratcliff, 1993).

Further, in an effort to be all things to all students, community colleges became known as pioneers in the distance education movement of the 1990s. The advent of the Internet and its growth to ubiquitous status has provided both risk and opportunity for community colleges to push the boundaries of the classroom. The technologies necessary to offer distance education and/or online courses can be expensive, and one poor decision about software or hardware can have long-lasting consequences for institutions operating on significantly smaller budgets than their four-year counterparts. According to Beach (2011), the adoption of the right learning management system is crucial for success in the distance learning arena. Somehow, America's community colleges have, for the most part, risen to the occasion and become the higher education leaders in distance and online learning (Beach, 2011).

As technology continues to grow and spread into the more remote areas of the country, the potential for people to access higher education expands. Unfortunately, the cost of owning a computer and maintaining access to the Internet is still beyond the reach of many Americans. Nevertheless, it is the ubiquitous nature of technology (including Internet access) that offers the

greatest hope for access to education (Beach, 2011), as well as opportunity for community colleges to continue to expand course offerings, services, and fundraising options.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, community colleges educate more than one half of undergraduate students in the United States. When both credit and non-credit offerings are taken into account, an estimated 100 million people have attended a community college since Joliet Junior College opened in 1901. Community colleges continue to educate individuals for the workforce, prepare teachers, and provide a low-cost option for the first two years of a bachelor's degree to students across the nation. In addition, community colleges have incorporated in their mission the provision of remedial education – to bring students up to par for college-level math and English courses – and adult basic education to bring those individuals who never completed a secondary credential the opportunity to pursue higher education (Patton, 2000).

By 2009, approximately seven million students were attending community colleges (Beach, 2011). As enrollment rates have continued to rise, so has public scrutiny. Specifically, community colleges have been (and continue to be) examined at the state and federal levels for retention and completion rates. Historically, community colleges have experienced high attrition rates – hovering around 70% when examined in light of an entire college career. In other words, only about a third of community college students remain enrolled until they complete a degree, compared to approximately half of those students enrolled in a four-year institution (Kennedy, 2015). A subtle shift in mission from student *access* to student *success* [emphasis added] likely poses the next great challenge to the American community college (Beach, 2011). When taken in light of recent and current fiscal challenges, the political landscape will certainly play an important role in defining the next 100 years for community colleges. Yet, these institutions continue to provide a basis of hope for bridging the gaps in higher education. When President

Obama released the details of his American College Promise in 2015, it became obvious, once again, that community colleges are seen as being critically important to solving a number of problems in higher education. The plan is to make two years of community college education available completely free of charge, thereby reducing the overall cost of higher education for any citizen who enrolls (Trainor, 2015).

### **Virginia's Community Colleges**

Community colleges in the United States have evolved to become institutions that provide nearly every kind of postsecondary opportunity their citizens need. Students pursue both general education for transfer to four-year colleges and universities and career and technical education (CTE) programs. In Virginia, approximately half of all community college students enroll with the stated purpose of transfer or develop that goal during their community college years (VCCS, 2014a). CTE students are traditional-age college students preparing for a career, working adults who find themselves in need of upgrading their employment skills or retraining for a different career path following a layoff, the unemployed and underemployed, and older adults seeking to develop a new skill set for personal satisfaction or for a second career (Ratcliff, 1993). Students enroll for credit (toward a degree) or in non-credit programs (for skill development and personal satisfaction). They attend class in person or online or in a hybrid version of traditional and distance learning environments. More than half of these students attend school part-time while working at least part-time. Women make up just under 60% of the student population, while just over 50% of those students are white (Kennedy, 2015) – statistics that have not changed significantly over the last 100 years.

It is interesting to note, however, that new categories of statistics are garnering the attention of the average citizen, the media, and state and federal legislators. For example, one

new statistic of interest is first-generation status. First-generation students have been defined as those whose individuals whose parents did not attend college. Generally, first-generation students enroll and graduate in significantly lower numbers than their peers whose parents did attend college (Kennedy, 2015). As of 2014, just over one third of all community college students could be classified as first-generation students. Single parents account for nearly one fifth of the student populations and more than 10% of community college students have some type of physical or learning disability (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

### **Community College Foundations and Fundraising**

The history of community college fundraising dates back almost as far as community colleges themselves. The first foundation for a community college was established at Long Beach City College in 1922, with a few others being established in the 1940s and 1950s. However, most community colleges established foundations after the widespread establishment of community college networks or state systems in the late 1960s. Some credit the birth and growth of community college foundations and external fundraising programs to the 1965 Higher Education Act. It was through the opportunity offered therein that community and junior colleges began applying for and receiving federal funding in the form of grants and contracts. Within a decade, most of these institutions had followed the example of their four-year counterparts in pursuing contributions from private donors (Schuyler, 1997).

In the early history of community college foundations, fundraising efforts were focused mainly on capital campaigns or building programs. Today, about 80% of all community colleges have a foundation, most of which remain focused on long-term endowments and student scholarships (Dillingham, Lawson & Weiss, 2013). However, the mission of the community college foundation has expanded to include friend building. In other words, foundation leaders

work to enhance the image and visibility of their colleges in hopes of garnering the support of community leaders, especially those who are wealthy or have influence in circles of wealthy prospective donors (Schuyler, 1997).

The first foundation established in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) came much later – around 1980. The New River Community College (NRCC) Educational Foundation was established to provide scholarships for needy and deserving NRCC students. The original donations came from private gifts; most of the donors were local professionals and leaders of industry. A donation of \$10,000 was invested in a perpetual endowment to yield a scholarship of \$500 per year, at that time (A. Covey, personal communication, September 20, 2016).

Within a few years, all 23 colleges in the Virginia Community College System had established foundations with similar strategies and goals: build endowments for the purpose of awarding scholarships to needy and deserving students. As fiscal conditions in the state have deteriorated, VCCS foundations have expanded both their fundraising strategies and their award protocols. For instance, the rising cost of textbooks have led some foundations to offer book supplements for its scholarship recipients or for other students that demonstrate that purchasing required textbooks would pose a financial hardship. As the cost of the initial investment for an endowed scholarship has increased, foundations have looked for creative ways to build larger endowment pools by utilizing returns on investment, holding special events, participating in statewide fundraisers, seeking local, state, and federal grant funding, and in the case of Virginia, creating a state-level foundation to help all VCCS students meet their unfunded tuition need. In recognition that less than 40% of the cost of attending community college is covered by state funding, the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCE) was established to

supplement diminishing state funds for colleges and to award special, high-visibility scholarships for students across the state (A. Covey, personal communication, September 20, 2016).

As the mission of the community college foundation has broadened, so have the fundraising strategies. Continuing to learn from their four-year counterparts, community college foundations have employed strategies such as annual campaigns, planned and deferred giving programs, special events, business partnerships or sponsorships, and the like, to build wealth (Schuyler, 1997). In a recent article, Paul Suchecki (2016) summed up beautifully the imperative for community college foundations to continue to broaden their fundraising efforts: “Community colleges are the poor cousins of higher education. Many are trapped in something akin to intergenerational poverty, serving lower-income students and producing few alumni who earn enough money to become major donors” (Sucheck, P., 2016, p. 1).

One potential source of revenue for four-year colleges and universities still largely untapped by community college foundations remains: alumni.

### **Alumni Giving in the Community College Context**

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted to examine the relationship between giving behavior and giving determinants among *community college* alumni (Skari, 2011). Nevertheless, existing research in the field of community college alumni giving and other affinity groups seems to indicate that, like giving at four-year institutions, multiple determinants of giving exist and that these determinants are interrelated (Terry & Macy, 2007). Jenkins and Glass (2010) assert that community college should “take another look at their alumni” (p. 610) as potential funding source. Since many community colleges have not built relationships with alumni, though, fundraising efforts are not likely to be effective without first engaging in some form of relationship management (Jenkins & Glass, 2010).

Community colleges are open-access institutions. With few exceptions, they do not practice selective admissions or have highly visible athletic programs. These factors, and others, lead to a prevailing idea: community college alumni are not loyal to their alma maters (Boyd, Williams & Pennington, 2009). Those who transfer to four-year institutions are assumed to transfer their loyalty to the senior institutions, while those who complete occupational or technical programs are enrolled for the purpose of gaining workforce qualifications or credentials and, therefore, have little interest in remaining engaged with the college (Skari, 2011).

The foundation for a lasting connection with one's alma mater begins while the student is enrolled at the college (Boyd, Byrd, Leatherwood, Pennington & Williams, 2010; Skari, 2011). Alumni who describe their experience at a community college as a "life-changing experience" (Boyd et al., 2010) tend to remain connected or engaged with their alma maters (Skari, 2011). Factors that contribute to these lasting connections include faculty members who have made a difference in the lives of the alumni, participation in extracurricular activities and athletics, and serving in student leadership roles (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009).

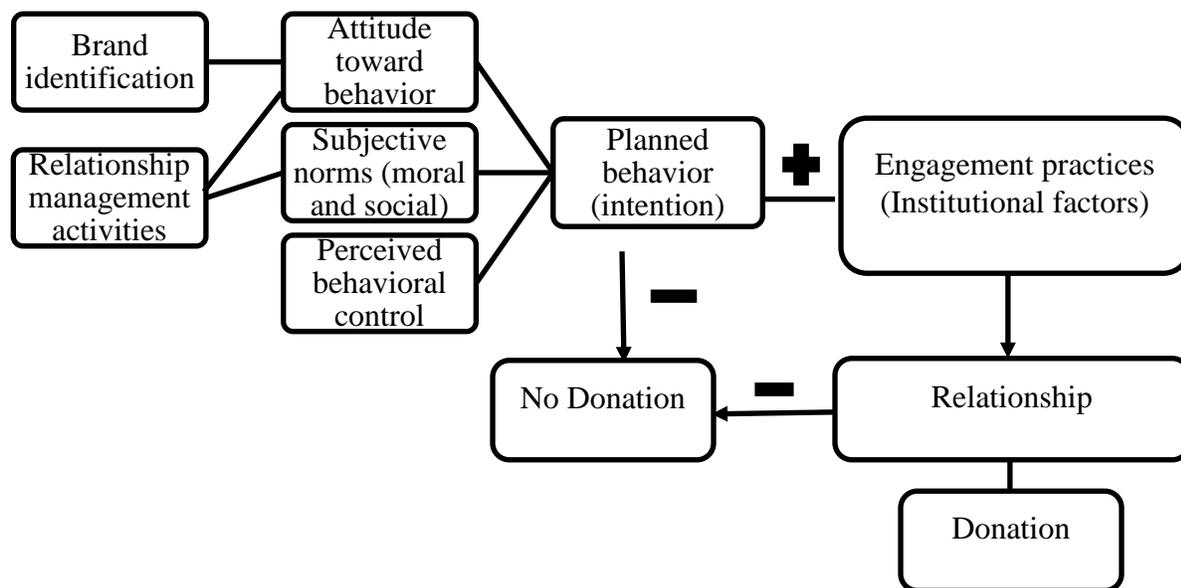
### **Need for the Study**

A dichotomous relationship emerges when one reviews the body of literature available related to alumni giving. On one side of the dichotomy, individual factors seem to determine whether a donation is made. In other words, intention to give accounts for the behavior – an idea that clearly aligns with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). On the other side of the dichotomy, however, institutional efforts to keep alumni interested in their alma maters have been found to correlate with giving. Donation behavior is predicated on the institution's ability to manage relationships with alumni – an idea that aligns with relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003).

### **Conceptual Framework**

What remains unclear is whether the relationship between intention and engagement is truly dichotomous. To gain a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to alumni donation behavior, the potential relationship between intention and engagement should be explored. Conceptually, the theory of planned behavior (intention) and the theory of relationship management (engagement) may interact to form the basis for decision making by potential alumni donors, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Support for such a conceptual framework can be found in the extant literature on alumni giving. For example, in their study of determinants of alumni association membership, Newman and Petrosko (2011) found that attitudinal measures were statistically significant positive predictors of membership status and type while other factors found in alumni donor literature – demographics and involvement or engagement measures – were not. In other words, attitude toward the behavior (joining the alumni association) was strongly and positively related to membership, and those positive attitudes towards membership were based on non-demographic and non-engagement factors such as satisfaction with the student and/or alumni experience, perceived value of membership benefits, pride in one's degree, willingness to recommend alma mater to others, and perceived improvement in life as a result of the individual's connection with the college or university (Newman & Petrosko, 2011).



*Figure 4.* Conceptual framework for studying the interaction of the theory of planned behavior and the relationship management theory

Research on alumni giving suggests that alumni feelings or attitude toward the institution has a direct influence on donation decisions. The more positive the feelings toward the alma mater, the more likely the alumnus/alumna is to make a donation to the institution (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Stephenson & Bell, 2014; Sun, et al., 2007). Again, the positive attitudes are based on student experience, pride in the institution, and brand identification (Stephenson & Bell, 2014).

All of the aforementioned attitudinal factors are related to attitude toward the behavior of joining the alumni association as one element of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. The same attitudinal factors could be outgrowths of relationship management activities like frequent communication, brand propagation, and general marketing strategies. While it is not possible to determine whether intention influences engagement, or whether a reciprocal relationship exists, it is possible to determine correlation between the two drivers of giving behavior. In other

words, this study does not seek to answer the question of whether brand identification and relationship management activities influence attitude or whether they come to play in the building of a relationship between institution and alumnus/alumna. Rather, this study attempts to determine whether relationship management activities have any predictive value for alumni donation at all.

The rationale for relationship management or engagement activities to use is based primarily on the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) 2012 study of alumni relations operations in American community colleges. A survey of 133 community colleges ranked performance metrics of alumni relations programs. The top three activities identified in that ranking were alumni donors, alumni attending special events, and alumni association members and, therefore, represent reasonable choices as predictor variables since these activities already carry meaning for alumni relations professionals.

### **Social Media**

When one how today's college students and recent graduates interact socially, a specific method of interaction comes to mind and merits deeper study: the use of social media. By January 2009, Facebook had over 175 million active users and 75% of all Internet users were also users of some form of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). The number of Facebook users in 2013 was estimated to be over 1 billion (Facebook, 2013). Since Facebook is only one avenue for social networking, it is difficult to estimate the total number of people who use some form of social media. The ubiquitous nature of social media has, in fact, spawned the term *constant contact society* (Watulak, 2010) – an indication of the importance and frequency of use of mobile technologies and social media in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The use of social media in an educational environment has been the subject of only a handful of studies (Bunker, 2011; Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Watulak, 2010), and the focus of such research has been the use of social media in the classroom exclusively. Community colleges have begun experimenting with the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to engage alumni (Halligan, 2010). Junco (2014) makes a convincing argument for extending that experiment in the college setting. “College students use social media at higher rates than the general population” (p. 9), an indication of the potential effectiveness of any social media platform as a method of communication and engagement. Most studies find that approximately 90 percent of all college students use Facebook, in particular (Junco, 2014), making it a likely candidate for research studies like this one.

In a survey of more than 31,000 college students, the Higher Education Research Institute (2007) found a positive correlation between Facebook usage (and usage of any social networking website) and student engagement with their institution. Heavy social media users spent more time participating in campus organization and were more likely to interact offline with friends than those who spent little or no time on social media. More important to this study is that frequency of engagement in specific Facebook activities was a stronger predictor of engagement than simply spending time on the site. Creating or responding to Facebook-announced events, for instance, was a stronger positive predictor of engagement than time spent browsing the newsfeed, commenting, or watching videos (Junco, 2014). In other words, users who were more engaged with Facebook are more likely to be engaged in other areas of their lives.

More than just a communication tool, however, social media platforms like Facebook can inform fundraising practice. One study found that a number of the personal characteristics of donors discussed above -- and others like political affiliation and religious preference -- could be

accurately predicted using Facebook likes (Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel, 2013). Furthermore, Lertputtarak and Supitchayangkool (2014) found that social networks like Facebook have a definite influence on alumni and current students' willingness to donate. It is unknown whether the use of social networking media influence donor behavior because, as Sun, Hoffman, and Grady (2007) found, individuals are more likely to provide financial support to organizations with which they more strongly identify. Stephenson and Yerger (2013) suggest that it is a strong brand identification on the part of alumni that leads to donation.

Examined within the context of the theoretical framework for this study, social media seem to provide plausible connections between theory and behavior. Research on the use of social media by students indicates that perceptions of social support is positively correlated to Facebook usage (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield & Fiore, 2011; Manago, Taylor & Greenfield, 2012). Furthermore, relationship building and maintenance is facilitated by Facebook usage among college students (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011; Manago, Taylor & Greenfield, 2012; Yang & Brown, 2013). Selwyn (2009) found that Facebook played a strong role in students' college integration. Specifically, students use Facebook to develop their identity as college students and to learn the cultural mores and norms of academia (Junco, 2014). It seems, then, that Facebook should be considered as an influencing factor within the confines of the theory of planned behavior – specifically with regard to subjective (moral and social) norms within the college community.

It is interesting to note that existing research indicates that some uses for Facebook and other social media platforms predict positive engagement outcomes while other uses predict negative outcomes. For example, as one might suspect, time spent chatting on Facebook was negatively predictive for time spent preparing for class. More surprisingly, time spent on

Facebook was positively predictive for time spent in extracurricular activities (Junco, 2014). Still, the use of social media is an emerging communication and engagement strategy and, therefore, warrants study as a means of engaging alumni.

### **Summary**

Based on the review of existing literature, it seems apparent that individuals make decisions about donating money – to charitable organizations or their alma maters – based on institutional and individual factors. Colleges and universities may be able to influence alumni giving decisions by identifying those who are more likely to give and by targeting fundraising efforts to alumni through solicitations that appeal to the moral norms of highly engaged alumni. In order to identify potential donors, though, a thorough understanding of the institutional and individual factors is needed. Since institutional factors seem to have a dichotomous relationship to personal factors, an exploration of the strength of intention versus engagement would likely provide new insights into the determinants of alumni giving. Furthermore, the use of social media in the engagement of college alumni has been, to date, largely unexplored.

Community colleges have challenges beyond those of their four-year counterparts. Most lack mature or robust fundraising operations. Because their alumni relations programs are relatively immature, community colleges rely largely on gifts from non-alumni donors to build their endowments. With limited fiscal resources, community college leaders need some assurance that a return on investment can be realized before infusing fundraising programs with money for expanded operations. The likelihood of such a return on investment can be realized if a predictive model for alumni donation can be crafted using the information gleaned from the existing research coupled with an understanding of the relationships examined in this study.

Utilizing existing research to identify the most likely personal attributes, this study seeks to examine how the individual or combined personal factors of engaged alumni – membership in the alumni association, attendance at special events, and donation (regardless of frequency of amount) – may be used to predict alumni giving. Furthermore, to examine the role of social media in the alumni relations context, Facebook – the most popular social media platform at the time of this writing – seems a logical platform for examining the aforementioned factors.

While the creation of a predictive model is beyond the scope of this study, the conclusions drawn can be used, along with a large body of extant literature, to develop such model. In addition, the findings can be used to inform practice in the area of alumni relations, fundraising, and use of social media by community colleges, especially in their fundraising and alumni relations operations.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Design

The study utilized a correlational predictive design. Specifically, the data collected were examined to determine what relationships exist between selected engagement strategies and intention to donate to the institution of higher education. This design is appropriate since no treatment was applied to any of the subjects and one of the research questions involves more than two independent variables. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine the correlation between a criterion variable and a combination of two or more predictor variables, and it provided an estimate of both magnitude and significance of those correlations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

### Research Question

The following research question was explored in the study:

**RQ1:** How accurately can *intention to donate* be predicted from a linear combination of Facebook *engagement* activities (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni?

### Null Hypothesis

To examine the research question, the null hypothesis was:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) and the linear combination of Facebook *engagement* predictor variables (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) for community college alumni.

## Participants and Setting

The target population for the study was alumni of community colleges in Virginia. However, the accessible population was limited. For the purpose of the study, alumni are those individuals who have completed an associate degree, certificate, diploma, or workforce credential from one of Virginia's 23 community colleges. These alumni included those who entered the workforce and those who transferred to a four-year institution subsequent to completion of an associate degree. As of 2013, this population exceeded 500,000 individuals (State Council, 2013).

A random sample was drawn from the combined alumni records of the 23 Virginia community colleges that chose to participate in the study. Six participating colleges provided alumni records to the principal investigator, who used a random number generator to select survey participants. Since research shows that only 2% to 5% of alumni respond to surveys (Worth, 2002), and the principle investigator anticipated no more than eight colleges would participate, the distribution of an estimated 3,000-5,000 surveys was needed to preserve generalizability of results. The principal investigator generated a random sample of 4,100 records for survey distribution. For this study a minimum sample size of 384 was appropriate for a small effect size with an alpha level of .05 with statistical power of .5 (Gall et al. 2007, p. 145). This study exceeded the minimum requirement.

Survey respondents included 76.7% from rural colleges. Conversely, 23.3% responded having graduated from an urban college. It is important to note that graduates of rural community colleges may have limited access to social media, whereas alumni of urban colleges would not have the same impediment to access. There were 24.1% of respondents from small colleges and 75.9% from medium colleges; there was no representation from large colleges in the Virginia Community College System. Size of college in the VCCS is defined by full-time-

equivalent (FTE) enrollment (VCCS Annual Enrollment, 2014). A larger percentage of females (58.5%) responded than males (41.5%). Of those respondents who indicated a race or ethnicity, 1.2% were Asian, 6.6% were Black or African American, 1.5% were Hispanic or Latino, and 85.7% were Caucasian. Fewer than 3% reported their race or ethnicity as American Indian, Pacific Islander, or Bi-/Multi-racial. Only 2.7% of respondents declined to identify race or ethnicity.

With regard to income, 47.4% reported annual salaries of more than \$50,000 and less than \$150,000 per year. Nearly 7.5% reported income levels higher than \$150,000. A large percentage – 37.4% -- earned less than \$50,000 per year. Most respondents (34.7%) were between the ages of 46 and 60, and most (38.8%) reported being younger than 25 when they graduated from community college. The majority of respondents (85.7%) are still living in Virginia.

Additional data related to the research question came directly from the participating colleges. The principal investigator provided a spreadsheet to participating colleges on which alumni registrations for college events, dollars raised through online collection services for annual campaigns, and new alumni memberships were recorded. Participating colleges categorized spreadsheet data according to Facebook follower status. The spreadsheet contained no identifying information of individual alumni and was returned to the principle investigator.

The setting for this study included an online experience – the Constant Contact website located at <http://www.constantcontact.com> – and colleges within the state-wide community college system. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) is comprised of 23 colleges that serve more than 100,000 students each year (VCCS Annual Enrollment, 2014). The majority of the 23 community colleges are located in rural areas of the state. However, more

than half of all students are enrolled in five colleges which are located in the state's urban, high-growth areas. Program offerings vary among the colleges, but all offer transfer programs as well as career and technical education programs designed to prepare graduates for the workforce (VCCS, 2014b).

### **Instrumentation**

Sample data were gathered using a survey instrument designed for this study, "Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey." (See Appendix A for instrument.) One question on the instrument was designed to measure intention to donate. The Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure was developed based on guidelines established by Ajzen (1991) for testing the theory of planned behavior. The Ranganathan and Henley measure (see Figure 5) is designed to gauge intention to donate to any charitable organization or worthy cause. The measure has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89 and has been validated through subsequent studies (Boenigk & Schuchardt, 2012; Merchant, Ford & Sargeant, 2010; Pentecost & Andrews, 2009). (See Appendix C for permission to use instrument.)

The remaining questions on the survey identified the respondent's alma mater and gathered demographic data. Construct validity for the Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure is discussed above, and permission to include the measure in the survey was obtained from the authors. The remaining questions on the survey are demographic in nature. The instrument contains a total of eight (8) questions, requiring 5-7 minutes to complete.

### **Procedures**

Once approval was obtained from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB), data collection began. (See Appendix B for IRB approval.) The survey was opened online and survey participants were invited by email, where possible, to complete the survey.

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|   | 1                      | 2 | 3 | 4                   |
|---|------------------------|---|---|---------------------|
|   | Completely<br>disagree |   |   | Completely<br>Agree |
| I am likely to donate to my alma mater in the future    |                        |   |   |                     |
| I will donate to my alma mater the next time I am asked |                        |   |   |                     |
| I will definitely donate to my alma mater in the future |                        |   |   |                     |
| I will recommend my alma mater to others for donation   |                        |   |   |                     |

*Figure 5.* Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure as it appears in the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey

When email was not a valid option for notifying participants, paper surveys were mailed. In all cases, surveys were returned directly to the principal investigator (PI).

Survey responses were collected between November 23, 2015, and February 23, 2016. Initially, the members of the randomly drawn sample were invited by email to complete the survey. Individuals with no email address were invited via letter, using the same message. (See Appendix D for invitation to participate in the survey.) Three weeks after the initial invitation to participate was extended, a reminder email was sent from the PI to invited participants. Subsequent reminders were sent at two-week intervals until the closing date in an effort to achieve a high rate of response. Colleges were invited to participate in the study via letter addressed to the college president. In many instances, the request letter was forwarded to the alumni relations staff for response. (See Appendix E for invitation to colleges to participate.)

Participating colleges gathered data on events, contributions, and memberships between December 1, 2015, and March 1, 2016. Spreadsheets for reporting the data were returned to the PI by March 7, 2016.

Finally, individual participants in the Facebook-announced events, annual campaigns, and alumni association membership drives were offered a link to complete the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey. No reminders to complete the survey were sent; rather, a one-time invitation to participate was offered at the time of response to the Facebook-announced activity. (See Appendix G for wording of the invitation to participate.) The corresponding data were gathered (through Constant Contact) by the PI between November 23, 2015 and March 7, 2016.

### **Data Analysis**

Data obtained for the predictor variables included registration through Facebook for events sponsored by the college (alma mater), contribution in dollars through Facebook to the alma mater's annual campaign, and applications completed through Facebook for membership in the alma mater's alumni association. Data obtained for the criterion variable included scores on the Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure of intention to donate. Data were gathered in two ways: through the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey and via a spreadsheet completed by participating colleges. Survey data and descriptive statistics were extracted from Constant Contact (an online service provider) to an Excel<sup>®</sup> spreadsheet. Data screening criteria included ensuring that scores on the independent variables are quantitative, scale data. Since data came from unique individuals not living in the same household, observations are considered independent. A visual inspection of all scores revealed that no unusual values existed, and frequencies of scores were tabulated to determine that variance was present.

Several assumptions underlying multiple regression analysis were tested. These assumptions were linearity, homoscedasticity, and extreme bivariate outliers. The assumption of linearity was examined using scatter plots. No curvilinear plots were identified (Warner, 2013,

p. 268 and 573); no violations were found. The assumption of homoscedasticity, was examined using scatter plots, which resulted in the classic “cigar shape” (Warner, 2013, pp. 268-269, 555, 573); thus, no violations were found. A scatter plot between each predictor variable and the criterion variable were examined for extreme bivariate outliers (Warner, 2013, p. 573). No violations were found.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine if relationships were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Variables of interest were the independent or predictor variables in the social media set (events, annual campaign participation, and alumni association membership) and the dependent or criterion variable of intentional engagement. No violations of assumptions were discovered and the dataset was imported into SPSS® for analysis. To test the strength of relationships, multiple regression analysis was used to compare each of the predictor variables in the engagement set (events, annual campaign participation, and alumni association membership) to the criterion variable (intention to donate).

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Research Question

The research question for this study was:

**RQ1:** How accurately can *intention to donate* be predicted from a linear combination of Facebook *engagement* activities (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni?

### Null Hypothesis

To examine the research question, the null hypothesis was:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) and the linear combination of Facebook *engagement* predictor variables (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni.

### Descriptive Statistics

Data obtained for the criterion variable (*intention to donate*), along with demographic information, were gathered through the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey. Frequencies of the demographic data are shown in Table 1, while descriptive statistics for the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) are shown in Table 2. Data obtained for the predictor variables were those associated with three Facebook-driven or facilitated activities: (a) registration for an event in response to an announcement through the college's Facebook page; (b) completion of a membership application to a college's announcement of its alumni

membership drive through Facebook; and (c) any donation (regardless of amount) given through an online giving portal in response to a solicitation through the college's Facebook page. These data can be found in Table 3.

Of the original 424 cases, 13 surveys were dropped from the analysis for missing data. Females (n=241) responded at a 17% higher rate than males (n=170) and an overwhelming majority of respondents were White (n=351). The largest number (n=154) and the greatest percentage (37.4) of respondents represented the lowest household income level. In fact, two thirds of all respondents reported household earnings of less than \$100,000 per year. More than one third of respondents were between the ages of 46-60 – young baby boomers and late Generation Xers. However, most were traditional age college graduates, having earned their degrees under the age of 25. More than 85% of respondents still reside in Virginia.

The six colleges represented in the study were primarily rural colleges in the western part of Virginia. Two colleges that had originally agreed to participate were omitted from the study because they were unable to carry out the prescribed Facebook activities. The remaining colleges varied in size but none were representative of the largest colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). Furthermore, the colleges vary greatly in terms of the economic health of their respective service regions. For instance, Alpha Community College is situated in a waning paper manufacturing economy and Echo Community College is situated in a dying coal mining community. Beta Community College and Foxtrot Community College both represent economic areas of slow growth and blended economic drivers (small business, hospitality and manufacturing, mostly) while Delta Community College represents a more suburban economy (VCCS, 2016).

Table 1

*Frequency Distributions of Variables (n = 411)*

| Variable          |   | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|---|-----------|---------|
| College           | Alpha                                     | 72        | 17.5    |
|                   | Bravo                                     | 163       | 39.7    |
|                   | Charlie                                   | 27        | 6.6     |
|                   | Delta                                     | 96        | 23.4    |
|                   | Echo                                      | 29        | 7.0     |
|                   | Foxtrot                                   | 24        | 5.8     |
| Gender            | Male                                      | 170       | 41.4    |
|                   | Female                                    | 241       | 58.6    |
|                   | No answer                                 | 0         | 0       |
| Race/Ethnicity    | American Indian/Alaskan Native            | 2         | 0.5     |
|                   | Asian                                     | 5         | 1.2     |
|                   | Black or African American                 | 27        | 6.6     |
|                   | Hispanic or Latino                        | 6         | 1.4     |
|                   | Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 0         | 0       |
|                   | White                                     | 351       | 85.6    |
|                   | Bi- or Multiracial                        | 9         | 2.1     |
| No answer         | 11  | 2.6       |         |
| Household Income  | Under \$50,000                            | 154       | 37.5    |
|                   | \$50,000 – 99,999                         | 122       | 29.7    |
|                   | \$100,000 – 149,999                       | 72        | 17.5    |
|                   | \$150,000 – 199,999                       | 21        | 5.1     |
|                   | Over \$200,000                            | 9         | 2.2     |
|                   | No answer                                 | 33        | 8.0     |
| Current Age       | Under 25                                  | 37        | 9.0     |
|                   | 25-30                                     | 60        | 14.6    |
|                   | 31-45                                     | 93        | 22.6    |
|                   | 46-60                                     | 146       | 35.5    |
|                   | Over 60                                   | 63        | 15.3    |
|                   | No answer                                 | 12        | 2.9     |
| Age at Graduation | Under 25                                  | 159       | 38.7    |
|                   | 25-30                                     | 104       | 25.3    |
|                   | 31-45                                     | 96        | 23.3    |
|                   | 46-60                                     | 41        | 10.0    |
|                   | Over 60                                   | 0         | 0       |
|                   | No answer                                 | 11        | 2.7     |

Table 1, cont.

| Variable            |             | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Current Residency   | Virginia    | 353       | 85.6    |
|                     | Other       | 59        | 14.4    |
|                     | No answer   | 0         | 0       |
| Intention to Donate | 1.00 – 2.49 | 193       | 47.0    |
|                     | 2.50 – 4.00 | 219       | 53.0    |

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Criterion Variable (n = 411)*

| Variable |  | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation |
|----------|--|-------|-----------------------|
| Q1       | Likely to donate in the future                 | 2.76  | 1.008                 |
| Q2       | Definitely donate next ask                     | 2.13  | .875                  |
| Q3       | Definitely donate in the future                | 2.50  | 1.000                 |
| Q4       | Recommend to others for donation               | 2.64  | 1.048                 |
| Combined | Ranganathan-Henley measure of intent to donate | 2.507 | .8220                 |

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Predictor Variables (n = 6)*

| Variable                                  | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation |
|---|-------|-----------------------|
| Registered for an event                   | 8.22  | 9.613                 |
| Responded to membership drive             | 85.91 | 98.402                |
| Contributed (responded to campaign “ask”) | 5.13  | 5.641                 |

## Results

### Data screening

Data screening was conducted on each of the variables (including demographic variables) to detect data inconsistencies and outliers and to examine normality of distribution. First, the procedure recommended by Warner (2013) was used to examine data for inconsistencies and errors; none were identified. Boxplots were generated using SPSS<sup>®</sup> to detect outliers on each of the predictor variables (event, membership, and donation) and the criterion variable (intention to donate). No outliers were identified. Normality of distribution was examined by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and through a series of the histograms (Warner, 2013). No violations of normality were found.

**Assumption tests.** A multiple regression was used to test the null hypothesis. Since multiple regression analysis requires that three assumptions be met, linearity, homoscedasticity, and the presence of extreme bivariate outliers were examined. The assumption that a linear relationship exists between each predictor variable and the criterion variable was examined using scatter plots (Warner, 2013). No curvilinear plots were identified and no violations of the assumption of linearity were found. The assumption of homoscedasticity, the variability in scores between the predictor variables and the criterion variable, was examined using scatter plots and between each set of predictor variables (Warner, 2013, pp. 268-269, 555, 573). No violations were found. A scatter plot between the between each predictor variables and the criterion variable were examined for extreme bivariate outliers (Warner, 2013, p. 573). No violations were found. See Figure 6 for a scatter plot matrix for all predictive and criterion variables.

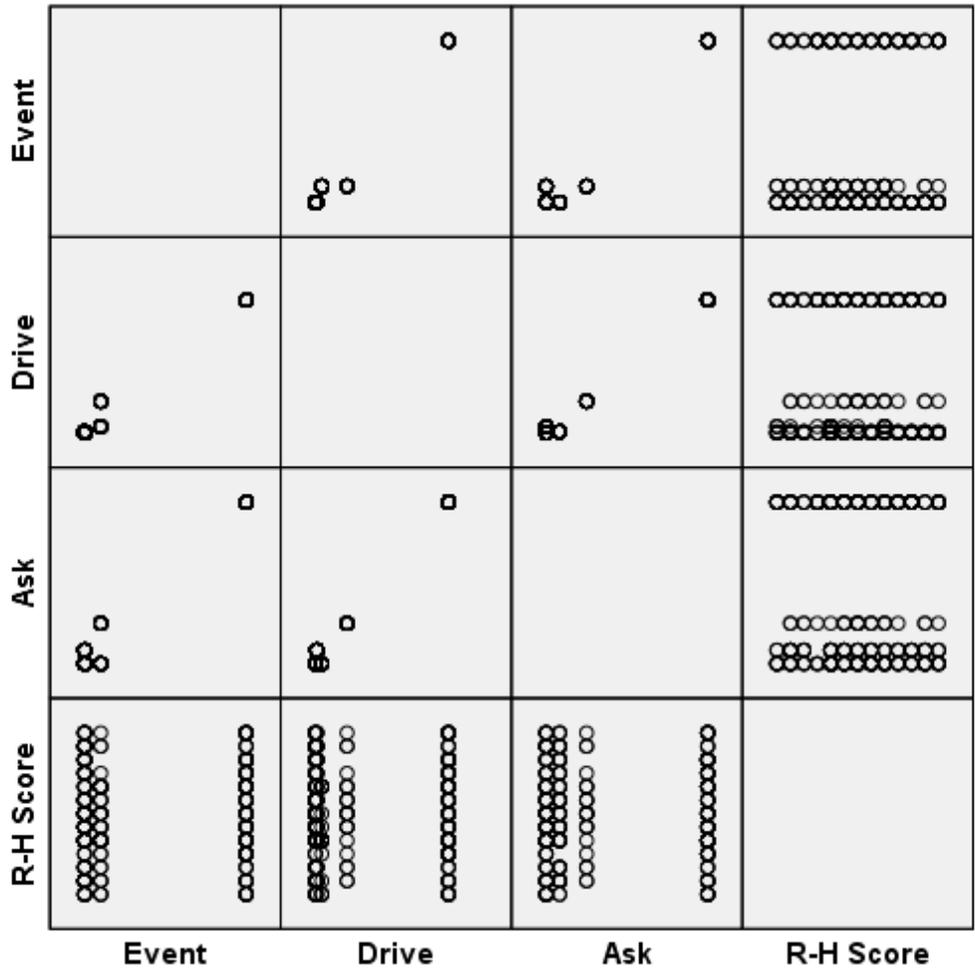


Figure 6. Scatter Plot Matrix for all Predictive and Criterion Variables

**Statistical Analysis**

A multiple regression was used to test the null hypothesis using a .05 alpha level, which failed to reject the null hypothesis. There was no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (intention to donate) and the predictor variables (event, membership, and donation) for community college alumni,  $F(3, 408) = 1.699, p = .167$ . The multiple correlation coefficient for the prediction model was  $R = .111, \text{adj } R^2 = .005, R^2 = .012$  meaning that only 1.2% of the variance can be accounted for by the linear combination of the measures.

Furthermore, each predictor variable was examined to determine how much each contributed to the prediction of the criterion variable. Each individual predictor's contribution was determined by examining their slopes using a *t*-ratio. Significance contributions among the predictor were *event* ( $p = .393$ ), *drive* ( $p = .948$ ) and *ask* ( $p = .443$ ). Thus, none of the predictors were found to be significant within the prediction model. See Table 4 for contribution of predictor variables.

Table 4

*Contribution of Predictor Variables for Intention to Donate (N = 411)*

| Variable | B     | SE B | $\beta$ | t     | Sig. | Correlation |         |
|----------|-------|------|---------|-------|------|-------------|---------|
|          |       |      |         |       |      | Zero-order  | Partial |
| Event    | -0.05 | 0.06 | -0.59   | -0.86 | 0.39 | 0.084       | -0.042  |
| Drive    | 0.001 | 0.01 | 0.07    | 0.065 | 0.95 | 0.09        | 0.003   |
| Ask      | 0.09  | 0.12 | 0.60    | 0.77  | 0.44 | 0.09        | 0.04    |

### Additional Analyses

Giving consideration to the results described above, and the fact that two of the participating colleges reported no responses for the engagement activities, a second null hypothesis was formed to attempt to determine whether significant relationships exist between the predictor variables (*event*, *drive*, and *ask*) and the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) under more uniform conditions. Specifically, the researcher utilized the same data to examine the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) and the linear combination of Facebook *engagement* predictor variables (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link

unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni in colleges reporting engagement data.

**Results of the statistical analysis.** Using only those colleges that reported engagement (event, drive, and ask) data, a multiple regression was used to test the second null hypothesis using a .05 alpha level. The null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (intention to donate) and the predictor variables (event, drive, and ask) for community college alumni in colleges reporting engagement data,  $F(3, 285) = 3.187, p = .024$ . The multiple correlation coefficient for the prediction model was  $R = .18$ ,  $\text{adj } R^2 = .02$ ,  $R^2 = .032$  meaning that 3.2% of the variance can be accounted for by the linear combination of the measures. Furthermore, each predictor variable was examined to determine how each contributed to the prediction of the criterion variable. Each individual predictor's contribution was determined by examining their slopes using a  $t$ -ratio. No single predictor was found to be significant within the prediction model. See Table 5 for contributions of predictor variables.

Table 5

*Contribution of Predictor Variable for Colleges Reporting Engagement Data (N = 288)*

| Variable | B      | SE B | $\beta$ | t     | Sig. | Correlation |         |
|----------|--------|------|---------|-------|------|-------------|---------|
|          |        |      |         |       |      | Zero-order  | Partial |
| Event    | -0.06  | 0.06 | -0.64   | -0.94 | 0.35 | 0.12        | -0.06   |
| Drive    | -0.005 | 0.01 | -0.57   | -0.47 | 0.64 | 0.13        | -0.03   |
| Ask      | 0.21   | 0.13 | 1.34    | 1.61  | 0.11 | 0.14        | 0.09    |

Furthermore, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to compare the mean scores on intention-to-donate (R-H Measure) for alumni of the six participating colleges (regardless of whether engagement data were reported). Examination of a histogram of

R-H Measure scores indicated that the scores were approximately normally distributed with no extreme outliers. Prior to the analysis, the Levene test for homogeneity of variance was used to examine whether there were serious violations of the homogeneity of variance assumption across groups (colleges). The Levene statistic was  $F(5, 406) = 3.46, p = .004$ , indicating that the variance in scores is unlikely to be based on random sampling; rather, the variances are unequal among the group and likely to be attributable to the college attended.

The overall F for the one-way ANOVA was not statistically significant,  $F(5, 406) = 2.013, p = .076$ . This corresponded to an effect size of  $\eta^2 = .024$ ; while that is a medium effect, it means that less than 2.5% of the variance in R-H scores was predictable based on college attended. See Figure 7 for a box plot of means R-H score by college.

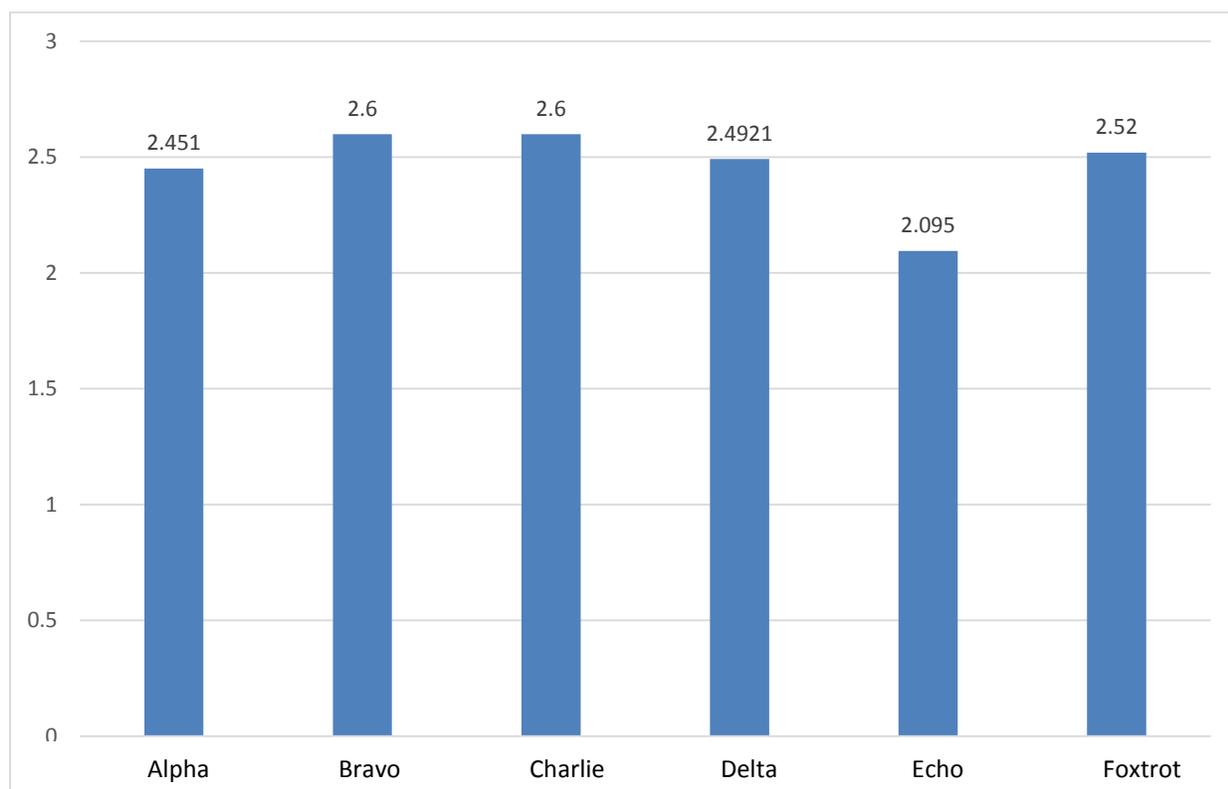
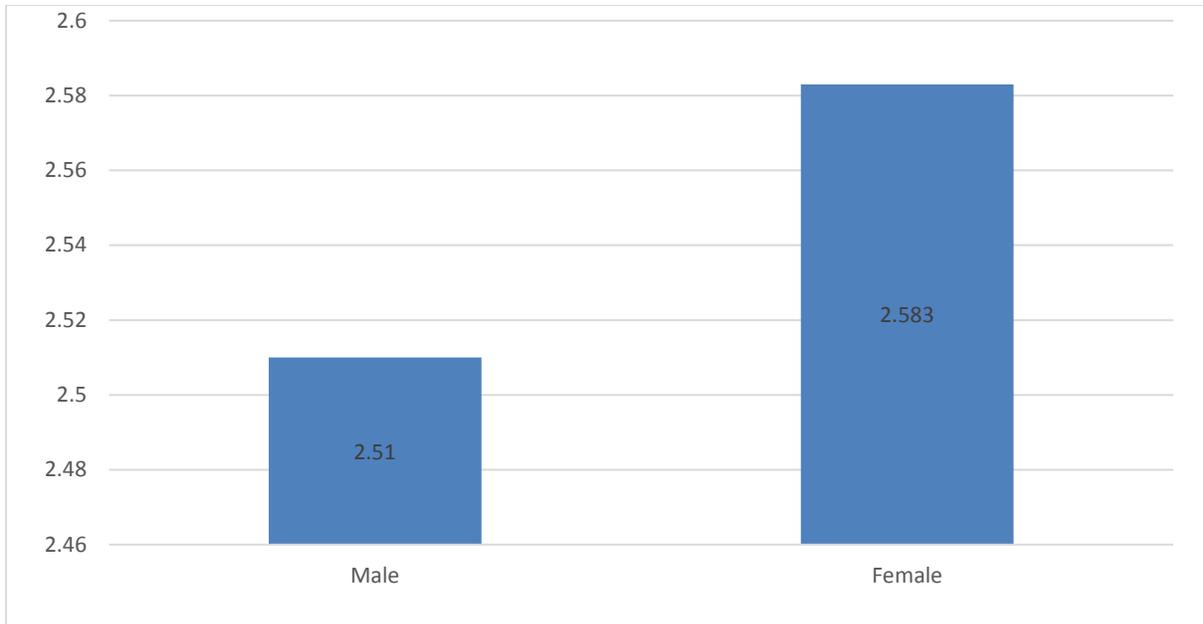


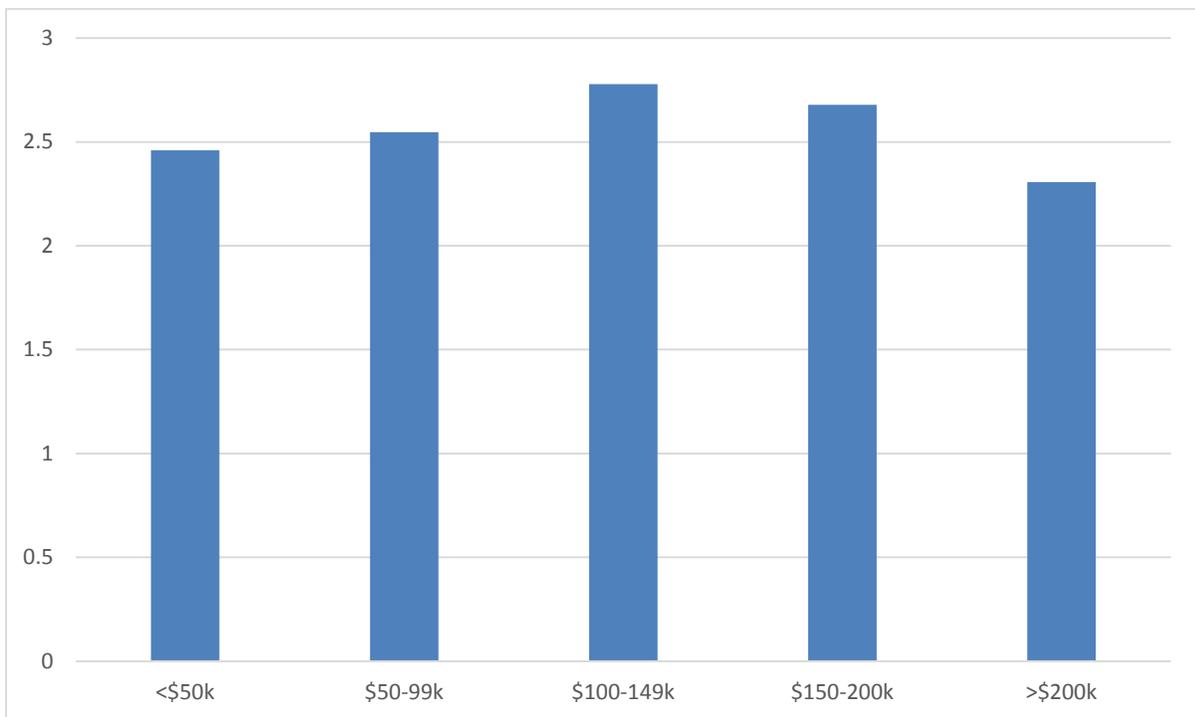
Figure 7. Mean R-H Measure Score by College

Two additional comparisons were made on the R-H Measure. A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance was conducted to compare the mean R-H Measure scores by gender and by income level. For the gender comparison, a histogram was used to confirm the assumption of normal distribution of males and females in the sample and the Levene test for homogeneity revealed no significant violations of the assumption of homogeneous variance between the two groups:  $F(1, 410) = 2.322, p = .128$ . The overall F for the one-way ANOVA was statistically significant,  $F(1,410) = 4.973, p = .026$ . This corresponded to an effect size of  $\eta^2 = .012$ , meaning that only 1.2% of the variance in scores was predictable based on gender.

The assumptions of normal distribution and homoscedasticity were tested in a similar manner for income level. A histogram of R-H Measure scores by income level revealed a mostly normal distribution of scores with no extreme outliers. Furthermore, the Levene test revealed no significant violations of the assumption of homoscedasticity:  $F(4, 374) = 1.947, p = .102$ . The overall F for the one-way ANOVA was not statistically significant,  $F(4, 374) = 2.211, p = .067$ . This corresponded to an effect size of  $\eta^2 = .023$ , meaning that less than 2.5% of the variance in scores on the R-H Measure is predictable by income level. See Figures 8 and 9 for box plots of means by gender and income level.



*Figure 8.* Mean R-H Measure Scores by Gender



*Figure 9.* Mean R-H Measure Scores by Income Level

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Discussion

The purpose of this correlational predictive study was to examine the theory of planned behavior as it relates to giving by alumni of Virginia's community colleges. A random sample of 4,100 alumni was drawn from the combined alumni records for 6 of the 23 colleges in the Virginia Community College System. The predictor variable is engagement, defined as an individual's participation in any college-related activity that occurs after his or her graduation (Horseman, 2011). For this study, three engagement practices were examined, individually and collectively, to determine the strength of relationship to the criterion variable. The three engagement practices were registration for a college event, joining the alumni association, and giving any amount to the annual alumni campaign or any campaign of the participating college's choosing that met the criteria for ensuring that alumni donations could be accurately recorded. All three engagement activities were announced and facilitated by the colleges' Facebook pages with unique links for registration, membership application, and donation. The criterion variable is intention to donate, defined as the measure of "how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Intention is central to the theory of planned behavior and is further defined by three contributing factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. To gauge intention for the purposes of this study, one's attitude toward giving to the alma mater was measured by the Ranganathan and Henley (2008) measure included in the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey.

The predictor variables were defined as *event* (registration, through a unique link, announced through Facebook, at a college event subsequent to the individual's graduation), *drive*

(response to a Facebook-announced membership drive for the college's alumni association), and *ask* (response to a Facebook-announced campaign or request for donation to the college for any purpose). The criterion variable was defined as *intention to donate*, as gauged by the Ranganathan-Henley measure in the Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey.

Because a large proportion of extant research identifies significant correlations between demographic factors and donation, the researcher selected two demographic factors that had been the subject of numerous prior studies for comparison. First, gender was examined in relationship to intention to donate. Prior studies show conflicting data regarding the significance of gender as a predictive factor. One finds that the research might indicated that males are more likely to give, that females are more likely to give, or that gender has no predictive relationship at all (Holmes, 2009; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Monks, 2003).

The second demographic factor examined was income level. Both logic and prior research lead researchers to believe that those alumni with the highest income levels are more likely to donate to their alma maters (Bryant et al, 2003). Weerts and Ronca (2009) and van der Linden (2011) found that the likelihood of donation increases dramatically when household income reaches the level of \$60,000 or higher annually.

Income is related to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Specifically, higher income levels should be correlated to perceived behavioral control. Put simply, those who make more money believe that they are able to donate to their alma maters, and other causes, because they have more discretionary income. If wealthy alumni have positive attitudes toward their alma maters and believe that their donation will receive the approval of peers and faculty members, they will donate because that are able to do so.

The current study aimed to examine whether attitude toward the institution and/or subjective norms can be influenced by relationship management. In other words, if alumni are more engaged with their institutions, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the institution and, therefore, fulfill that element of the theory of planned behavior (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Lertputtarak & Supitchayangkool, 2014; Stephenson & Bell, 2014). One element of alumni engagement – contact with fellow alumni and institutional faculty and staff – may influence potential donors’ perceptions of approval of their giving behavior (Sun et al., 2007).

To determine whether relationship management has any influence on intention to donate, the researcher examined how accurately intention to donate can be predicted from a linear combination of engagement activities by community college alumni. Furthermore, since the use of social media has become ubiquitous in our society and recent studies indicate that Facebook usage can be used to predict personal characteristics such as political affiliation and religious preference (Kosinski et al., 2013), the specific hypothesis included the use of Facebook for engaging alumni. Thus, the following null hypothesis was formulated to answer the main research question:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant predictive relationship between the criterion variable (*intention to donate*) and the linear combination of Facebook *engagement* predictor variables (registration in response to a Facebook-announced event, joining the alumni association through a Facebook-driven membership campaign, and donation in dollars through an online giving link unique to a Facebook announcement) by community college alumni.

Subsequent analysis was performed in order to fully explore the research question and second null hypothesis was formed and examined. The results of the original analysis support

the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) while the results of the subsequent or additional analysis support relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003).

### **Conclusions**

Three conclusions can be drawn from the study. First, relationships matter. Even though the original null hypothesis could not be rejected, the subsequent analysis – which refined the null hypothesis to include only those colleges reporting engagement data – revealed a statistically significant predictive relationship between the engagement factors and intention to donate. Colleges that put even minimal effort into relationship management with their alumni will likely reap the rewards of alumni donation.

Second, consistency matters. There was no statistically significant relationship between college attended and intention to donate – a finding that contradicts previous literature that indicates that loyalty, created during enrollment at the college, is predictive of alumni donation (Skari, 2011). Far more important than feelings of loyalty held over from one's enrollment at the college seems to be the continuing relationship created through a variety of activities or benefits offered to potential donors after graduation. The value of consistency, though, can only be seen in a closer examination of how the participating colleges conducted those activities. All six colleges indicated that, prior to the study, they had used Facebook to announce college events. However, the two colleges excluded from the subsequent analysis – Delta Community College and Charlie Community College – had not used Facebook for announcements, requests, or other opportunities directed at alumni prior to participation in the study, whereas the other four participating colleges had consistent communication practices in place for alumni relations that included use of Facebook. Consistent application of their alumni relations practices (relationship

management) seems to have resulted in effective use of social media for the engagement activities.

Third, effort matters. Two colleges in the original study group had to withdraw prior to distribution of the survey for the simple reason that their alumni relations programs were inadequate for conducting the engagement activities and/or providing alumni contact information for survey distribution. Other colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) declined participation from the outset. In at least three cases, the college was unable to even generate a listing of its alumni. To state the obvious, without an alumni relations program in place, community colleges cannot hope to influence intention to donate through engagement activities.

### **Implications**

The study indicates that there are advantages to the colleges in creating and propagating some type of alumni relations program. Logically, institutions cannot expect alumni donations to become a significant source of income without taking steps to build and sustain (manage) relationships with their graduates. Only through engagement practices designed to build and sustain relationships between the institution and its alumni is it possible to predict or influence intention to donate. With limited resources, community colleges need to identify those alumni who are most likely to donate so that those limited resources can be directed toward pursuing donations from the most likely sources.

Because the vast majority of extant research on alumni giving is based on studies of four-year colleges and universities, this study has helped to bridge the gap in the research. Still, little is known about community college alumni donors and there is ample opportunity for future studies to expand the body of knowledge in that area. Particularly useful might be an exploration

of the four underlying assumptions of alumni fundraising models found in the literature: (a) positive student experience; (b) positive alumni experience; (c) alumni motivation; and (d) alumni demographics. This study has explored, in part, the assumptions of positive alumni experience (engagement) and alumni motivation (intention to donate).

While a model for alumni fundraising efforts goes beyond the scope of this study, it should be mentioned as an ultimate goal. Advancement (fundraising) professionals in the colleges and universities should not ignore alumni as a potential source of revenue, as discussed earlier. Thus, the development and utilization of a fundraising model based on relevant research is both desirable and practical. The bases for such a model have been explored in this study, thereby providing an initial foundation for the development of an alumni fundraising model.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

**Assumptions.** The first assumption underlying the study is that the accessible population of community college alumni is representative of the target population of all community college alumni in Virginia. Because community college alumni programs vary widely in maturity and breadth of practice, it is unlikely that all 23 colleges in Virginia have comprehensive alumni records. Therefore, the principal investigator relied on the information available from participating colleges.

The second assumption is that the independent variables selected for each research question are approximately as effective as other closely related variables that might be studied. For example, volunteering at one's alma mater might be used as a variable; however, it is likely that alumni volunteers are more strongly engaged with their alma maters. Therefore, utilization of volunteerism as an independent variable may be an overrepresentation of the general state of engagement.

The third assumption is that Facebook usage is an appropriate representation of overall social media usage. While a number of other social networking services are available to alumni, Facebook is the most common platform (Junco, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Smith, 2014). Furthermore, approximately 81% of community colleges reported using Facebook to communicate with alumni (Paradise & Heaton, 2013). Finally, it is important to note that, while Facebook is used primarily by post-baby-boomers, it is gaining popularity among baby boomers and traditionalists. Therefore, members of every generation currently served by community colleges are making use of Facebook (Bunker, 2011).

**Limitations.** The most significant limitation of the study can be found in the review of literature – namely, that the individual characteristics associated with alumni donation are not included in the study. Since the goal of the study was to inform practice, colleges will need to consider the individual factors related to donation that have been identified in extant literature to inform overall alumni fundraising practice. Any model developed for identifying alumni with high potential for donation will require the inclusion of both individual and institutional factors.

An additional limitation exists in the research design. Because true experimental design was not possible, causal relationships were not identifiable. In other words, the study did not identify a specific engagement practice or group of practices that cause alumni to make philanthropic donations to their alma maters. However, practices that correlate with increased engagement (in the first research question) or intention (in the second research question) serve to strengthen the hypothesis. Likewise, lower correlations weaken the hypothesis, potentially opening the field of study for new hypotheses (Campbell & Stanley, 1966).

Only one social media platform was utilized. While Facebook was the most frequently used medium for all age groups at the time of the study, some trend data has begun to surface

that indicates a trend away from Facebook by some groups of users – Millennials, in particular (Handley, 2015). Future studies of the same type should consider the utilization of other platforms, especially in seeking to understand those alumni who have graduated most recently.

One significant threat to internal validity exists for the study. For quasi-experimental studies utilizing convenience samples, a selection threat to validity exists because pre-existing differences between the participants selected for the study or those who volunteer for the study and those who are not in the study are significant (Warner, 2013). Performing statistical comparisons between groups, as was done in this case, helps to address this threat.

Perhaps the most significant limitation to this study resulted from the lackluster participation of the colleges. Two of the six institutions participating in the study reported no engagement data. Either no alumni responded to their Facebook activities or Facebook was not used or otherwise ineffective at attracting the attention of those colleges' respective alumni. This condition may be indicative of the inconsistency of alumni relations programs throughout the Virginia Community College System.

Through discussions with alumni relations directors in the participating colleges, the researcher was able to validate the suspected differences in engagement practices between sister colleges. Bravo Community College, for instance, had undertaken a program of re-engaging alumni through the use of social media approximately three years before the onset of this study. Other colleges had been using Facebook (and in some cases, other social media) for announcing events or otherwise engaging all stakeholders, without making a direct effort to engage alumni specifically. Finally, some colleges are not making use of social media for engagement; rather it is used to promote the interests of the college and announce its event and achievements. It is not used as an engagement (two-way communication) vehicle.

When all six institutions are included in the analysis, the results do not accurately reflect the engagement of alumni in general. In order to get a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of Facebook engagement, it was necessary to exclude the engagement data of two colleges. Unfortunately, doing so limits the data available for analysis and compromises the generalizability of the results.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

One obvious option for future research is to repeat this study after more colleges develop alumni relations programs and implement practices consistently. Doing so might reveal a stronger predictive relationship. More importantly, it may reveal that specific engagement practices have a greater influence on intention to donate, thereby providing data to inform practice. It is also possible that broader participation of colleges would lead to different results, provided that additional colleges with current robust alumni relations programs can be identified.

The body of research on alumni relations, intention to donate, and relationship management would benefit from studying the different social media platforms available currently, and those that are emerging. This study was limited to the use of Facebook – the most popular platform at the outset (and conclusion) of the study. However, research indicates that the popularity of Facebook is waning (Cannarella & Spechler, 2014). Thus, effective alumni relations practice and relationship management for donation are likely to be affected by such shifts in popularity and/or the emergence of new platforms.

Because more than 85% of the survey respondents in this study were Caucasian, little remains known about donor practices and intention by minority alumni. While one might assume that community colleges enroll larger percentages of minority students than some of their four-year counterparts, a greater understanding of the makeup of the student bodies and,

therefore, alumni groups is needed. Furthermore, the body of literature would be enriched through the study of minority alumni giving practices and attitudes.

Future studies might also include alternate methods of engagement. For instance, researcher might study the effect of alumni volunteerism on volunteers' intention to donate. Such a study might be constructed in pre-test/post-test format for greater generalizability. In fact, utilization of a pre-test/post-test design may affect the results if the current study were repeated with intention to donate being measured before and after the engagement activities are conducted.

Individual colleges may benefit from conducting similar studies to determine how to influence their respective alumni most effectively. While the results did not indicate the existence of a statistically significant relationship between engagement and intention to donate by college, the examination of college data did reveal that one college – Echo Virginia Community College – had lower scores than its sister colleges that actually conducted alumni engagement activities. The researcher found that the college had not kept its alumni information current; in fact, its database of more than 15,000 alumni records contained no email addresses. Approximately one quarter of the invitations to participate in the survey that were mailed to alumni were returned for insufficient addresses. Echo Community College, then, would benefit from conducting an individual study to determine how best to cultivate relationships with alumni for many purposes, including influencing intention to donate. The same might be found for other colleges, both in Virginia and in other state systems, given the overall immaturity of alumni relations programs in community colleges throughout the country.

While the current study begins to examine donor motivation through the Ranganathan-Henley measure of intention to donate, much remains to be learned about alumni motivations for

giving. Furthermore, research on alumni giving in the community college context is still shallow in comparison to that of the experiences of students and graduates in the four-year context. Put simply, the stories need to be heard. Additional studies – both quantitative and qualitative – are needed for insight into the community college alumni donor in ways that will allow community colleges to better serve alumni, build and sustain relationships, and design predictive models for realizing the full potential of alumni donations to the college budget.

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FORM

Community College Alumni Engagement: Exploring the Relationship of Social Media to Alumni Giving  
Amy J. H. Hall  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the relationship of social media engagement activities to alumni donation in the community college. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a graduate of a Virginia community college. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Amy Hall, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the degree to which community college graduates engaged with their colleges through social media, specifically Facebook, are likely to become donors to their college.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to follow the link below and complete a short survey.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study poses no more risk than everyday activities. Surveys are anonymous and individual information will not be released. Colleges may contact you regarding donation; however, such contact would be purely coincidental.

The benefits to participation are based on the information gained from survey participants collectively. The results of the study will enable community colleges to identify practices that create better relations with their respective alumni and predict alumni giving behavior to address institutional needs.

#### **Compensation:**

You will receive no payment in exchange for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Records will be stored on a password-protected flash drive and stored in a locked office. After three years, the flash drive will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the community college from which you graduated. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Amy Hall. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 540-553-4234 or [ahall@nr.edu](mailto:ahall@nr.edu). Furthermore, you may contact Ms. Hall's advisor, Dr. Eric Lovik at (727) 748-6008 or [eglovik@liberty.edu](mailto:eglovik@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Begin Survey

## Virginia Community College Alumni Giving Survey

---

1. Please provide the name of the Virginia community college from which you earned a degree, diploma, or certificate (your alma mater).

\_\_\_\_\_

[Skip this question]

2. Using the scale provided (1= completely disagree; 4 = completely agree), please answer the following questions:

|   | 1<br>Completely<br>disagree | 2 | 3 | 4<br>Completely<br>Agree |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| I am likely to donate to my alma mater in the future    |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will donate to my alma mater the next time I am asked |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will definitely donate to my alma mater in the future |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will recommend my alma mater to others for donation   |                             |   |   |                          |

[Skip this question]

### Demographic Questions

3. What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]

4. What is your race or ethnic group?
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Bi- or Multiracial
- Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]

5. Please check the appropriate range below that most closely approximates your 2013 household income.
- Under \$50,000
  - \$50,000 – \$99,999
  - \$100,000 -- \$149,999
  - \$150,000 -- \$199,999
  - Over \$200,000
  - Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]
6. What is your current age range?
- Under 25
  - 25 to 30
  - 31 to 45
  - 46 to 60
  - Over 60
  - Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]
7. What was your age when you graduated from community college?
- Under 25
  - 25 to 30
  - 31 to 45
  - 46 to 60
  - Over 60
  - Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]
8. Are you currently living in Virginia?
- Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
- [Skip this question]

**Thank you for your responses!**

## APPENDIX B

## Liberty University IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 21, 2015

Amy Jennifer Harrell Hall  
 IRB Exemption 2079.082115: Community College Alumni Engagement: Exploring the Relationship  
 of Social Media to Alumni Giving

Dear Amy,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
  - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
 Administrative Chair of Institutional Research  
 The Graduate School

**LIBERTY**  
 UNIVERSITY  
 Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

## APPENDIX C

### Permission to Use Instrument

Hi Amy

You have my permission to publish this measure in your thesis and in databases. Good luck with your final defense

Regards

Sampath Ranganathan, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Marketing  
Austin E. Cofrin School of Business  
L.G.Wood Hall, Suite 480C  
University of Wisconsin- Green Bay  
2420 Nicolet Drive, Green Bay, WI - 54311-7001  
Ph: 920-465-2484

<http://www.uwgb.edu/busadmin/faculty/ranganathan.asp>

God Bless America

---

**From:** Amy Hall <[ahall@nr.edu](mailto:ahall@nr.edu)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, December 6, 2016 1:20 PM

**To:** Ranganathan, Sampathkumar

**Subject:** Permission to Publish

Good afternoon, Dr. Ranganathan. A couple of years ago, I requested permission to use the intent to donate measure you and Dr. Henley developed. As a reminder of that request, I have included the relevant email string below. I am grateful for your permission and have used the measure to construct a survey for my doctoral research. I'm happy to say I have now successfully defended my study and am ready to publish it.

Liberty University requires that, beyond permission to use, I obtain your permission to *publish* the measure. I am attaching my study for your reference. The survey instrument is printed on pages 107 and 108. May I please have your permission to publish your measure in my study? (Primarily, publication is electronic, through ProQuest. The School of Education and I will have bound hard copies.)

Many thanks for your consideration.

Amy Hall

Ranganathan, Sampathkumar <[ranganas@uwgb.edu](mailto:ranganas@uwgb.edu)>

Wed 10/8/2014 3:08 AM

Hi Amy

I am glad about you using the intent to donate measure. You are most welcome to use it in your study. If you have any questions or need any further assistance, don't hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Sampath Ranganathan

Hall, Amy

Tue 10/7/2014 6:45 PM

Sent Items **To:**

Ranganathan, Sampathkumar <[ranganas@uwgb.edu](mailto:ranganas@uwgb.edu)>;

Good afternoon, Dr. Ranganathan. I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, currently working to finalize my dissertation proposal for IRB review. My study aims to determine the relationships that exist between intention to give and efforts to engage alumni as they lead, ultimately, to donation in the community college setting. While more than one method of gathering data will be utilized, the important measure of intent to donate will be gathered using a simple survey administered to a random sample of Virginia community college alumni.

I would be grateful if you would give me permission to use the measure of intent described in your 2008 article with Dr. Henley:

Determinants of charitable donation intentions: A structural equation model. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 13, 1-11. doi: 10.1002/nvsm.297

I have located subsequent studies that have utilized the same question to measure intent to donate (based in Ajzen's theory of planned behavior). For my specific study, the question would look like this:

|   | 1<br>Completely<br>disagree | 2 | 3 | 4<br>Completely<br>Agree |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|
| I am likely to donate to [my alma mater] in the future    |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will donate to [my alma mater] the next time I am asked |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will definitely donate to [my alma mater] in the future |                             |   |   |                          |
| I will recommend [my alma mater] to others for donation   |                             |   |   |                          |

If you have questions or wish to see more information about my study, I will gladly supply it. I will, of course, credit you and Dr. Henley with the development of the measure.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Amy Hall

## APPENDIX D

### Invitation to Alumni to Participate in the Survey

You have been randomly selected from approximately 500,000 alumni of Virginia's community colleges to participate in a study on alumni giving. Your participation is an important element of a doctoral study being conducted by an Ed.D. candidate at Liberty University entitled, "Community College Alumni Engagement: Exploring the Relationship of Social Media to Alumni Giving."

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey; you can expect the survey to take less than 10 minutes of your time. You will NOT be asked to provide your name, email address, phone number, or any other information that might identify you individually. Rather, by following the link below, you will be offered an anonymous survey for completion.

It is possible that your college will contact you subsequent to your participation in this study. However, such contact would be purely coincidental since neither I nor your college will know that you have completed the survey.

Your completion of the survey as part of the study will help your college and others in the Virginia Community College System to design better alumni relations and fundraising programs. At no time during the study will you be contacted by the researcher for the purpose of soliciting a donation. You may, however, receive reminder emails about completing the survey.

Thanks for helping me with this research study. To complete the survey, following this link:  
[link here]

Sincerely,

Amy J. H. Hall

## APPENDIX E

### Invitation to Colleges to Participate in the Study

DATE

Dear [President]:

As a doctoral student at Liberty University and an administrator at New River Community College, I'm writing to seek your consent to include your college in my research study, "Community College Alumni Engagement: Exploring the Relationship of Social Media to Alumni Giving." I hope that the details below will convince you of the merit of the study and garner your support.

Undoubtedly, you are aware of the funding challenges facing Virginia's community colleges and the need for those colleges to supplement their general fund budgets with donations from businesses and individuals in order to continue to provide access to higher education for all citizens of the Commonwealth. You are probably also aware of the challenges inherent in soliciting such donations from the approximately 500,000 community college alumni: our colleges do not have prestigious athletic programs and class reunions hold little appeal for our students since they are more likely to have formed relationships based on affinity groups rather than graduation class. In short, community colleges cannot model their alumni relations programs after those of four-year institutions. The question becomes, then, what activities or engagement practices might enable community colleges to develop and maintain strong relationships with their alumni and, potentially, turn those alumni in college donors?

The significance of this study is found in its ability to inform fundraising practice in the community college environment. In order for community colleges to create successful alumni fundraising programs, a clearer understanding of which engagement practices work and which ones do not is needed. A comprehensive understanding of intention, relationship management, and the potential interaction of the underlying theories for those concepts would allow community college leaders to make informed decisions about their alumni relations and fundraising programs.

The study involves two facets: a survey of randomly-selected Virginia community college alumni and three Facebook-driven activities conducted at participating colleges. The goal is to determine the correlation of "engaged" alumni to the measure of giving intention (which will be collected via the survey). Your college's involvement would include extracting and providing alumni contact data to me for drawing a random sample. It would also include conducting three activities and tracking alumni participation (those who participate via Facebook and those who do not) in those activities.

I would be happy to discuss this request with you or your advancement officer and answer any questions you may have prior to giving your consent to have your college participate in the study. Please know that it is my intention to minimize the burden on your staff by providing as much assistance as possible in the completion of the associated activities.

I look forward to hearing from you. I can be reached by phone at (540) 553-4234 or by email at [ahall@nr.edu](mailto:ahall@nr.edu).

Sincerely,

Amy J. H. Hall