Student-Donor Memberships Within Collegiate Athletics

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Health, Sport, and Exercise Science – Sport Management and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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Date Defended: Thursday, May 9th, 2019

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Abstract

A popular approach for showing support to collegiate athletics is by becoming a member to a college or university's athletic annual fund. These memberships are created through an annual charitable contribution that is then exchanged for the equivalent benefits associated with the amount or giving level a person selects. Although they are not a norm within athletic annual fund, student-donor memberships are offered to current college students as a way for them to begin thinking about philanthropic giving before they graduate and leave school. As a result of the limited research that exists on donor memberships in general, the purpose of this study was to discover the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics. To further understand the benefits for offering student-donor memberships, the author used qualitative, semi-structured interviews to allow for each participant's unique beliefs, feelings, and insights on the topic to be further explored. The participants that were interviewed within this study consisted of NCAA Division I fundraising and development associates that have had experience working with student-donor memberships. The results of this study produced five primary factors associated with student-donor memberships: structure, benefits, membership fee, communication, and branding. Additionally, the "transactional vs. transformational" and "experiences" sub-categories, both presented within the benefits theme, were significant facets of student-donor memberships that stimulated the interest of the fundraising associates being interviewed. This study contributes to literature within the realm of philanthropy, applying primarily to fundraising practices, donor relations, and structuring donor memberships. This research is useful due to there being no existing data on student-donors within collegiate athletics, but it does contribute to furthering the research conducted on donor motives within an athletic annual fund, as we attempt to extend the donor lifecycle.

Acknowledgement

To my parents, throughout my entire life you have challenged me to set high goals and have always reminded me to “keep the faith” during my times of struggle. Although I have made many questionable choices along the way, the two of you have trusted that my decisions would lead me to where I was destined to be. You instilled in me a second-to-none work ethic that has allowed me to understand the difference between doing just enough and taking that extra step to set myself apart. Your love and commitment to guiding both Kaylee Bo and I on our path towards success, while also teaching us to enjoy the process, has made all the difference.

To my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Brian Gordon, I will never be able to thank you enough for taking a chance on me. I came to you at one of my lowest points and you believed in me enough to take on this adventure together. My only hope is that through the countless hours you spent on providing me with new ideas to ensure this study’s success, that you are as proud of the end-results as I am. I also could not be more excited to begin my doctoral studies in the fall under your tutelage.

To Dr. Jordan Bass, Dr. Bernie Kish, and the participants of this study, without all of you it would have been impossible for me to bridge the gap between student-donor memberships and what we know about the donor lifecycle. Due to the extensiveness and sensitivity of the elements this study covered, your willingness to sacrifice your time brought us closer to understanding the role student-donor membership’s play. As a result of your efforts, crucial concepts were able to be accurately covered in-depth while designing the “ideal student-donor membership”.

Finally, to Papa Fred, we did it. I would never have even begun this journey if it wasn’t for you. Throughout all the trials and tribulations, I know you’ve been the courage and strength that has flowed within me and kept me fighting. I wish more than anything you were still here to watch me graduate and I’ll continue to do everything I can to make you proud.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the nation, collegiate athletic departments are constructing new state-of-the-art facilities and offering premiere benefit packages to not only recruit potential student-athletes, but also for enhancing their fan support and engagement. However, due to the growing financial crisis that is occurring throughout the nation, “Fundraisers in NCAA Division I athletic departments are under increasing pressure to procure donations” (Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). Athletic departments have to rely on their fundraisers now, more than ever, to implement new and innovative ways to obtain the multi-million dollars in funding needed for these campaigns. While prior research has examined both donor motivations and consumer behavior tied to fan identification, in a general sense, the purpose of this study is to discover the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor (current college student) memberships within collegiate athletics. The secondary purpose for this thesis is to also detail the best practices acquired through NCAA Division I athletic fundraising and development annual funds for implementing the “ideal student-donor membership”.

The significance behind focusing specifically on student-donors resides in the fact that this younger generation will be the future target market for organizations, due to their higher earning years coming as they approach middle-age (Hall, 2014). The issue with this is that throughout the time between when the students graduate, until they reach the 49-67 year old demographic, the opportunity to construct a financially rewarding relationship with many of these former students has already been lost. One crucial detail that is often overlooked is the fact that the older donors become, the more likely it is that they choose to donate to multiple areas within the university, instead of giving solely to athletics. When specifically studying the 49-67 year old demographic in terms of their total donations per year, “not only are Boomers the largest group numerically, with 51 million individuals comprising 34% of the donor base, they are also the largest contributors, giving an estimated total of $61.9 billion per year (43% of all the dollars donated)" (Jacobs, 2013). By breaking down the number of different charities this demographic elects to donate to, the average comes out to 4.5 per year for the 49-67 year old baby boomers, compared to 3.3 for the 18-32 year old millennials (Motif Investing, 2016). While the average of 4.5 charities varies per donor, the leading areas for where the money may be going has been found to be 38% to places of worship, 36% to local social services, 22% to children's charities, 19% to health charities, 18% to animal rescue protection, 15% to troops/veterans to, before finally reaching 14% going towards educational areas (Hartnett & Matan, 2014). In regards to this specific study, due to athletics not being an option, it should be seen as a sub-category to educational charities due to it dealing with college student-athletes.

In attempting to comprehend the concept of donating in general can be done so through the term *philanthropy*, which encompasses this act at its simplest form. According to Merriam-Webster, *philanthropy* is defined as: "goodwill to fellow members of the human race; especially**:** active effort to promote human welfare" (Philanthropy, 2018, para. 1). When it comes to forming a starting point for categorizing donors, three classifications have been developed to assist fundraisers in recognizing and implementing the proper approach, based on why a donor is even interested to begin with. It should be noted that while the names of the categories may differentiate throughout fundraising departments, the descriptions for each specific category are commonly understood. According to Sanders and Tamma (2015), the first category, "purely altruistic", includes the donors who elect to donate for primarily philanthropic reasons, which mean they believe in the cause the charity supports. Next, "impurely altruistic" covers those donors who enjoy the self-satisfaction that stems from knowing they supported a cause. The final category, “not-at-all altruistic”, is for the donors that simply want to show how much money they have.

In the past, the idea of student-donors was structured around class-fundraisers, which would typically go towards planting a tree or hanging a plaque on behalf of the graduating class. Today, however, universities have moved away from asking for gifts to fund a specific project, electing to instead turn to requesting “unrestricted” money which can be used wherever the university decides it is needed the most (Johnson, 2012). But while universities may have turned their focus away from using student-donors to fund specific gifts, there is adequate proof that this method was successful and could easily align with projects within an athletic department.

In 2011, for a class gift, the graduating classes at George Washington University and University of Virginia donated over $90,000 and half a million, respectively. Even looking as far back as 2001, the U-VA graduating class raised $60,000 for their gift (Johnson, 2012). By reviewing these numbers and realizing that that amount of money was raised for an “on behalf of” graduation gift, athletic fundraisers could shape this potential into creating student-donor gifts to go towards “naming rights” on a stadium, locker room, or office.

The issue with beginning the process of turning students into donors, however, is the minimal information that exists in regards to the cultivation process that should take place between a fundraiser and student. One of the most common strategies is that a greater emphasis should to be placed to showing students just how valuable the degree and experience they received at the university is (Leffler, 2018; Metnick, 2014). Especially when it comes to applying this to donations towards athletics, students may feel reluctant to see how a small donation from them is even worth it compared to a top-level athletic donor who may give upwards of $50,000 annually.

Statistically, it is important to realize that “Millennials born between 1981 and 1995 make up 25.9% of the population, but account for just 11% of total U.S. charitable giving” (Notte, 2018, para. 2). With that being said, “While 72% of Baby Boomers give to charity and 59% of Generation X does the same, 84% of Millennials give to charitable organizations” (Notte, 2018, para. 3). The significance to this data is not that the millennial generation does not make large donations, but that at their young age they are already showing their *willingness* to donate.

But even though student-donors have displayed an interest in donating, *how* they are marketed to also presents both a unique opportunity and challenge for athletic fundraisers. Leffler (2018) believes that universities can foster a devoted support system by providing them with the feeling of belonging to a community, resulting in stronger ties being built. In regards to collegiate athletics, what it comes down to is constantly attempting to engage students with anything occurring within the department. Johnson (2012) presented the idea of avoiding focusing solely on receiving a charitable gift from students, while instead teaching about the importance of philanthropy and the duty they have of being a lifetime donor. Although it is common for athletic departments to discuss with their student-athletes before they graduate about the importance of giving back, this information is not always communicated to the non-student-athletes.

Potential student-donors must realize that while the impact they had within athletics may only be of them cheering in the stands, these events still played a vital role in their college experience. In a study conducted in 2015, it found that the “Average student affinity was 7.1 out of 10, with 81% of students attending at least one live sporting event” (Axon, 2015). What this study shows is that college athletics plays a part in the majority of college students’ experiences, so a connection already exists for athletic fundraisers to justify the reasoning behind targeting students as potential donors.

During the cultivation process with a student-donor, fundraisers are not going to be able to sell them on the same benefits that would win over a donor in the 49-67 age range. Fundraising and development specialists have begun focusing on unique offerings such as more affordable tickets, Wi-Fi connectivity, enhanced game-day promotions, and incentives for donation renewals to stimulate growth in support among the student population (Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). For student-donors, many may not typically be interested in priority points and how those points help them get great seats years down the road, they are concerned with what they are getting *now* by making a donation and that starts with increased engagement. According to Popp, Barrett, and Weight (2016), officials are realizing the likelihood of fewer alumni donations being acquired in the future as a result of decreasing current-student identification levels. But with a growing emphasis placed on engagement, none of this matters if student-donors are not successfully reached through the platforms they operate to interact with the constant flow of news that they are receiving.

This fact is why understanding donor motives, as they apply to student-donors, is imperative to learn because without knowing how to reach this untapped market, the entire process for restructuring fundraising and donations in collegiate athletics will be ineffective. When it comes to studying donor motives, a concept that is necessary to grasp is the *relationship management theory*, which is simply defined as having constant interaction with and engagement from your intended audience. “Relationship management aims to create a partnership between the organization and its audience, either customer or business, rather than consider the relationship merely transactional.” (Relationship Management Theory, 2018, para. 1)

In regards to applying this to the process of uncovering donor motives, through the connections that are made between fundraisers and donors, the reasons for why the individual donates is often shown through these personal interactions. However, it is this idea that prompted the question of whether or not it would even be possible to develop a framework for applying donor motives across an entire network of donors, before any interactions ever take place. Based on the research that currently exists, a few of the leading motives for donors include: "believing in the mission of the organization (54%), believing that their gift can make a difference (44%), experiencing personal satisfaction, enjoyment or fulfillment (39%), supporting the same causes annually (36%), giving back to the community (27%), adhering to religious beliefs (23%)" (AICPA Communications, 2017). Although these areas provide a starting point for understanding donor motives, further research needs to be aimed at understanding how these areas apply to student-donor memberships within collegiate athletic departments. With the goal of this study being to discover the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics, the hope is that these factors positively impacting student-donor motives, therefore promoting relationships to develop earlier. If these goals can be accomplished then this study will aid in athletic annual funds progressing towards overcoming the current financial crisis, through increased student-donations within collegiate athletics.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The structure for this literature review will cover several areas within the context of fundraising and development in collegiate athletics. Beginning with the existing theories of donor motivations, the reasons behind why someone elects to give financial support towards an organization will be presented. Next, in offering an overview of the background for donor motivations, tangible vs. intangible benefits will show how those motives entice an individual to become a small vs. large donor. Finally, by focusing on the varying donor demographics within collegiate athletic, connecting the existing theories with the primary motives will uncover whether commonalities can be applied across both current and potential new categories.

Theories of Donor Motivation

Theory of Charitable Giving

Similar to the theory of planned behavior, the theory of charitable giving (TCG) draws from several similar ideas and is also structured around three specific areas for studying donor motives. As was the case with Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995), they provided the three concepts that the TCG relied on: altruism, reciprocity, and direct benefits. In the case of connecting collegiate fundraising efforts and altruism together, Mann (2007) discussed that due to the common feeling of being pressured by society to support a cause, it should be understood that many individuals are going to have an altruistic preference to the university that they attended.

While there has continued to be researchers conducting their own study on the altruistic approach, many still only endorse what was already previously known. One of the early studies conducted by Pomazal and Jaccard (1976) endorsed that: 1.) While still important, being able to help someone was not enough to make someone donate. 2.) The way a person could help determined what kind of assistance they would give. 3.) Unplanned factors can occur and change the behavior of someone by overshadowing their initial reason to give. 4.) Just because someone gave once does not mean they will continue to do so, their initial reason may be forgotten. Radley and Kennedy (1995) presenting the approach in another way by discussing how it gives donors the opportunity to essentially feel better about themselves for the wrongs they have committed, thus providing them with a clear conscience.

But while altruism involved motivations leading someone to give to benefit the receiving party, reciprocity focuses on what a donor is getting in return for their money. According to Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995), even if nothing is guaranteed, with reciprocity the motivation stems from just knowing that by donating a person has a better chance of getting something back in return. In other words, applying the concept of reciprocity to collegiate fundraising, the act of giving would be motivated by the benefit of potential return in the form of aid. Other than in a situation where an alumnus to the university has a child that is granted special consideration for their efforts to being accepted, the concept of reciprocity plays a much greater role in areas such as churches and organizations that help those in their daily lives (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995).

For fundraisers focusing on donor motives related to the reciprocity approach, existing research shows that they will find more success in securing a gift if they allow the donor to truly elect to donate on their own and also by only offering their assistance in a voluntary manner, not forcing it on the person (Weiner, 1986). However, even though reciprocity may play only a small role in collegiate fundraising, the last concept of the TCG, direct benefits, definitely does. When it comes to direct benefits, the advantages that those associated with the department receive can range from the priority seating to simply just better parking spots for home games (Stinson & Howard, 2004). Other incentives that fall under direct benefits, for example, may include being listed and shown on commemorations or even naming rights to buildings and rooms, though typically these benefits are still only available for the most financially supportive donors (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995).

Social Identification Theory

In presenting the existing research that has been conducted on social identification theory (SIT) and organizational identification theory (OID), there have been several studies that have linked the two concepts together. Tajfel and Turner (1985) conducted a study on SIT and their results showed that individuals will make decisions which result in a more positive self-identity for them. They also found that people will compare both sides, meaning what they will get out of being a part of something versus what they will miss out on by not, before they make a decision. Lastly, if someone is involved with a group that is proving to be unsatisfactory for them, they will either elect to leave the group in search of a better option or they will take the necessary proactive steps to do their part in making the group more distinctive (better) than the others options. The idea behind SIT is that it gives individuals a sense of belongingness to a certain group in which they then align themselves with everything that happens within it, thus creating a strong personal connection to each triumph or letdown (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). According to Schervish and Havens (1997), the concept of belongingness was also explained as the ability to associate different people into one group through the collective factors of personal beliefs and similar connections. In doing so, it then allows both parties to align themselves together into one similar lifestyle.

Becker (1974) took this theory a step further and decided to apply this concept to families and found that it is possible to enhance family's charitable behavior through motivations that result in an overall improvement to the life and well-being of the family. An additional point that was found by Ashforth and Mael (1989) presented the concept of SIT not conforming to the typical views and beliefs existing in most groups. Normally when dealing with groups, members identify the strongest when leadership is present and a high level of interaction occurs. In other words, the take-away from this is that collegiate fundraisers need to realize that even if their donor membership situation seems like a negative environment for donors to be associated with, they should let it run its course because there is a chance donors do not even realize it themselves. Hixon (2012) further discussed how when applying SIT to the context of fundraising within collegiate athletics, the focus is on the bond that is formed because this theory is built on an individual's self-identification with the organization.

Relationship-Marketing Theory

During their study to better understanding the foundation behind relationship marketing, Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) established that,

> "A key goal of relationship marketing theory (RM) is the identification of key drivers that influence important outcomes for the firm and a better understanding of the causal relations between these drivers and outcomes" (p. 231).

Within a collegiate athletic department, this concept can be seen through fundraisers building and supporting positive relationships between the organization and its valued donors. Mann (2007) stressed the importance of total communication between both parties because that is how an organization can do its part to guarantee overall satisfaction for those involved. In regards to understanding this theory there are two methods to know: 1.) Relational benefits approach and 2.) Relationship quality approach (Hennig-Thaurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002).

The relational benefits approach can be defined as the incentives a consumer receives from their commitment to a long-term relationship with a company or organization that goes above and beyond the core service performance (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998). In applying this to a collegiate athletic situation, if a donor does not purchase their season football tickets before the deadline, if they have been loyal fans who have purchased for many years then the department may make an exception and allow them to still purchase the same seats that they have had in previous years thanks to their existing relationship. Bendapudi and Berry (1997) explained this approach in an even simpler manner by illustrating how the benefits that are received do not even have to be completely satisfying for the customer, as long as what they are receiving still out-weights the alternative of them not receiving it at all or going with a different option.

During a study focused on the relationship between customers and salespersons one main conclusion was found. According to Reynolds and Beatty (1999), positive perceptions of the benefits associated with a particular relationship occur in instances where mutual satisfaction exists between a customer and a salesperson. When there is a strong relationship between a customer and salesperson it results in satisfaction between the customer and the company as a whole. The significance in the findings of the Reynolds and Beatty (1999) study is due to it relating to the type of relationship that exists between donors (customer) and fundraisers (salesperson) or even between donors and the entire athletic department (company).

For the relationship quality approach, this concept focuses on addressing all of the necessary requirements that both parties have, which will then showcase a relationship that is both strong and progressive (Smith, 1998). Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) found that this approach is structured on whether or not a salesperson is able to eliminate the initial hesitation that a customer may have before purchasing or renewing. With uncertainty, comes doubt which means that this method is designed to assure customers that there is no need for them to be concerned with “service failure or negative outcomes” (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990, p. 70).

However, one of the main advantages that collegiate athletic departments have in focusing on the relationship quality approach is the lack of competition they have to face with their intended customers (donors). Crosby (1991) discussed how the bond that is formed between both parties is created by how positively or negatively they interact, when and where they interact, and also their similarities that they both have as two separate entities. While a key aspect of this method is assuring consumers that their investment will be beneficial, fundraisers in collegiate athletes can approach the relationship knowing that the competition they face with the consumers they are targeting really only comes down to the person deciding whether or not to donate at all.

With situations such as powerhouse collegiate athletic departments, Dorsch, Swanson, and Kelley (1998) expressed an idea that could assist fundraisers in their future approach to target customers. They stated how it should be expected for a relationship to exist based on a mutual understanding between parties that the goal is to both create a stronger relationship, while also improving the organization's status. (Dorsch, Swanson, & Kelley, 1998). What this is in reference to is a scenario where if a donor increases their annual giving then that should confirm that the donor has the intention of building a stronger relationship with the athletic fundraising department, which itself is able to enhance its prestige due to the increase in financial support.

Another way to understand this concept is through the departments that consistently produce winning programs and treat donors well, thus allowing them to capitalize on this aspect by both enticing new donors and also solidifying the existing ones for future years to come. In applying the relationship-marketing theory to motivating donors within collegiate athletics, Hixon (2012) presented that the relationship is built, sustained, and strengthened to assure that the donor's satisfaction is always upheld. A focal point with this theory is to enhance the reputation of the organization through its ability to grow contributions as a result of its strong relationships with donors. This is why in some instances the relationship-marketing theory has become known as the *stakeholder theory* (Hixon, 2012).

Donor Motivations

In studying donor motivations, there exists a range of factors behind what entices individuals to transition from simply being a fan in the stands to making a financial donation. As it has been discussed, donor motivations are typically derived from their ability to receive tangible or intangible benefits as a result of their donation to the organization (Stinson & Howard, 2010a; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). According to several studies, for those donating to a collegiate athletic department, the ability to purchase season football tickets is often the most important, if not the only reason, many choose to give to begin with (Stinson & Howard, 2010a; Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). However, in terms of the "*why"* people choose to donate, this decision can be traced back to eight categories based on the following motivational aspects that drive their support: philanthropy, vicarious achievement, commitment, affiliation, socialization, public recognition, tangible benefits, and power (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014). Popp, Barrett, and Weight (2016) referenced that within their research they did find support behind another argument pertaining to there being a strong motivation for donors within collegiate athletics to improve the overall quality of the sports programs that the department oversees. While their findings would fall under the intangible benefits category, better programs lead to a higher "want" for season tickets, so through an individual's donation they are still essentially setting themselves up for the future for receiving the tangible benefit of better season ticket seats at the games.

For a donor that actually gives for the intangible benefits, these are individuals who seek the ability to be a part of something (to belong), are in support of the university's goals, and who give because in doing so they get to help build the "prestige" of who they are supporting (Tsiotsou, 2007). The main dispute with intangible benefit motivations is that it often occurs in a directed-giving academic context, meaning that people will give to the school of education, business, nursing program, etc. due to the usage of the financial support being used only in that specific area (Eckel, Herberich, & Meer, 2014). However, in times of increased athletic success at the university, Martinez, Stinson, Kang, and Jubenville (2010) found that donors do have a tendency to still change their giving patterns from this academic focus, to an athletic focus. As was previously presented, these "split" donors do not realize that in most cases with Division I universities, the athletic department is a separate entity from the university which means any financial support it receives goes directly within their department only (Stinson & Howard, 2010a).

In terms of how large of small of a donation an individual is willing to make can be predicted based on their current level of income and also how involved with the organization they plan to be (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Along with these personal factors, how much support an organization makes an individual feel is needed for them to succeed is another aspect that has proven to result in increased giving (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014). Donors want to feel like their contribution is needed so it makes sense that they would need that communicated to them either by the athletic department, or more likely the athletic fundraisers (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014). If donors feel that their gift serves little purpose in the grand scheme of things then there are plenty of other areas for them to give their financial support to (Stinson & Howard, 2007). When viewing donor motives in the context of how much support is needed by a specific program, by taking it a step further fundraisers can witness first-hand why successful football and men's basketball programs receive the most financial support. These programs have the ability to overshadow the less-successful sports since they provide donors with the ability to feel they played a role in meeting the team's needs to achieve success (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014).

Resulting from past research on donor motives, seven categories were formed for donors to be grouped into based on their purpose or motivation to give financial support. Each of these categories has been explained by Stinson and Howard (2010) as:

> "Communitarians: give to improve the communities in which they live. Devout: give out of religious obligation. Investors: give for tax breaks or other personal economic benefit. Socialites: give for social access and benefit. Repayers: give in exchange for previous or expected service from the organization. Altruists: give to selflessly help others. Dynasts: give out of family tradition" (p. 746).

The significance that differentiating between these seven segments has is that for fundraisers planning their approach, knowing where an individual falls on this scale can assist them in selecting the method that has the better chance of resulting in a donation to the department. While future additional research should be done to build more on the incentives individuals in each of these categories are looking for, just by knowing the general idea can be helpful. For example, when dealing with someone considered an altruist will alert fundraisers that they are incentivized by intangible benefits, while someone in the investors segment will be seeking the tangible benefits that they will receive (Stinson & Howard, 2010a).

But while these segments show where an individual is currently at, research has also shown that personal preference for a program begins as early as eight years old, with the establishment of a strong identification for a specific team (program) occurring before the age of 15 (Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). Why this is important is that it shows how donor motivates may not simply be based on factors present in their current life. The general knowledge of the seven segments that Stinson and Howard (2010a) discussed, when applied to Popp, Barrett, and Weight's research, would then result in these categories beginning their development during an individual's younger years, typically progressed by an individual's parents or grandparents (Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). This idea would make sense because according to Kolbe and James (2000) it was found that fathers are the main influence behind who their child grows up to support. Especially in collegiate athletics, focusing on donors in the "dynasts" category, these individuals are motivated by family tradition, meaning that fundraisers could begin looking at which of these current donors have children who are also now adults. What this does is it presents the opportunity of keeping the "family tradition" (Stinson & Howard, 2010a) going by getting their children active in the donor system, thus resulting in another generation of donations.

Types of Donors

Standard Donor

Research has shown that when it comes to the lifecycle that exists for individuals who donate to universities, throughout the beginning of their post-college years there are few donations overall and those that do give donate gifts that are rather small (Tom & Elmer, 1994). While looking into the progression of large donations, it typically occurs within 10 to 20 years after someone graduates, but it does still continue to grow between 20 to 30 years out (Tom & Elmer, 1994). Tom and Elmer (1994) also discuss how once an individual reaches 40 years post-graduation, it becomes noticeable that there is a decline in their donations. Another study focused on college donating as a whole found that universities that have a high fraternity and sorority involvement have been shown to receive greater donations than institutions that have a larger part-time student population (Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson, 1995). It has also been noted within several readings that simply having NCAA Division I athletic programs resulted in no increase in donations (Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson, 1995; Terry & Macy, 2007), which would make sense due to the earlier discussion on *success* being one the main determining factor in driving college athletic donations (Mael and Ashforth, 1992).

In regards to the ideal donor characteristics, it is become evident that men elect to participate in financial donations more than women (Stephenson, A., & Yerger, D., 2014; Terry & Macy, 2007; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). However, Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) did acknowledge the fact that collegiate athletic fundraisers should discuss the available options for re-directing their approach so that they can better adhere to the wants and needs of potential female donors. Several studies have also presented the motivations that drive female donations being connected to the philanthropic aspects versus the tangible gifts and social recognition that male donors are more interested in (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2006). But in illustrating the ideal image of a collegiate athletic donor, throughout his valuable studies on the topic, Tsiotsou (2006) has been able to conclude that:

> “Donors in athletics are married males from 40–60 years old, they are engaged in a profession or business, they are residents of the state, and they live within 200 miles of the campus. They are not yet retired, and over 65 percent of them have incomes exceeding $40,000 per year (p. 210).

By furthering the concept of an individual’s ideal income, Tsiotsou’s (2004) study presented the bond that exists between donor income and donor motivation, with each having the ability to affect whether or not a financial gift is made. For athletic fundraisers, having the benchmark of $40,000 yearly income allows them to focus on if a high level of identification does exist between the individual and the department, thus showcasing the existing motivation, or lack thereof, towards supporting the cause. When a situation arises where an individual shows the capacity to give, along with the motivation to, it should be expected for a donation to occur (Tsiotsou, 2004).

Two additional aspects that apply to donor characteristics involve whether an individual is either currently involved in sports or has prior experience in participating in them (Tsiotsou, 1998), as well as whether education levels are a factor that lead to donations (Tsiotsou, 1996). When looking into the effects of current or previous involvement in sports, Tsiotsou (1998) stated how this quality could be applied to those that simply play intramural sports. His thought process stems from past attempts to further the existing research that has introduced the idea of how being involved with a product can lead to future giving (Tsiotsou, 2006). As for educational levels that donors have, according to the studies conducted by Shapiro and Ridinger (2011), as well as Tsiotsou (1996), graduate degrees accounted for the most donors but were followed closely by those with undergraduate degree.

Large vs. Small Donors

One of the lesser-known areas within this field that have still yet to be fully studied are the factors that contribute to the separation of big versus small donors (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). However, while researching the information that does currently exist, it is stated that observing the total size of the alumni base within the athletic department provides a way for fundraisers to see the lifetime giving potential due to the fact that the more donors they have, the more opportunities for giving being able to occur (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). The idea of an individual becoming a “big donor” simply due to fact that they have the available income is also presented by Mahony, Gladden, and Funk (2003). During their study they discovered that one of the factors they were able to connect to separating a big versus small donor was when the individual was a rich, businessmen (Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003). This concept of rich businessmen can be connected to the later findings of Humphreys and Mondello (2007) due to these individuals falling into the category of those who managed to have a greater amount of disposable income that they could then use to separate themselves from the other smaller donors.

An additional factor that can be more easily witnessed is the relation that exists between a donor’s size and the preferred seating options for season tickets that athletic departments offer (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). This situation is a common case of supply and demand, meaning that for successful athletic programs, the “want” individuals have for the best seats is greater than the available seat options that facilities have, thus resulting in donors being required to donate more money to secure these prime locations (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). The one major take-away from the seating and donor level relationship can be found through Tsiotsou’s (2006) study where he found that donor attendance at games did have some effect on giving level. He was able to concur that those attending games had more motivation to give much larger contributions than those who were not in attendance (Tsiotsou, 2006).

But while the ability to obtain primary seats is a driving force for enhancing donations, the reliance on an athletic programs success for increasing donor’s demands for them is not a recommended method to rely solely on. The results from prior research on this matter have shown that an athletic programs success in relation to donor’s increasing their gifts, as well as overall giving in general, tend to fluctuate (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). In yet another negative outlook on the existing situation, Stinson and Howard (2010b) found that nearly three-quarters of the donors that give charitable donations up to $5,000 do so because that is the minimum amount that they can give to still be able to receive the primary seat locations they desire.

Although there have been a number of studies conducted to investigate the bond between athletic success and increased donor giving, the results have varied in showing any significant difference between when a programs have winning or losing seasons (Gaski, & Etzel, 1984; Litan, Orszag, & Orszag, 2003). Gaski & Etzel (1984) even go as far as to state that the belief of a program's success having much of a positive effect on turning small donors into large ones sounds great in theory, it unfortunately has in reality become a way for departments to make a situation seem better than it really is. With that being said, Litan, Orszag, and Orszag (2003) still felt that they could decipher the mystery of creating a "big donor" by focusing both on athletic departments spending for the football program, as well as the program's success afterwards, but neither had any effect of changing donors giving status.

Former Student-Athletes

One additional area that should be further researched for assisting with the development of a framework for increasing student-donors is the relationship that exists between former student-athletes and donating. While past research is limited, a study by Shaprio, Giannoulakis, Drayer, and Wang (2010a) showed that within the school they surveyed, the number of former student-athletes that elected to give a charitable donation back to their athletic department was a mere 5%. The issue with former student-athletes choosing not to give back to the department after they have graduated stems from the fact that while they attended and represented the university, they were given educational financial support, school gear, and also the chance continue to playing their sport, both with and against, some of the nation's top athletes (Gormley, 2014).

In another case, the feedback researchers received in regards to the factors that motivate former student-athletes in their decision of whether or not to donate is a result of how positive or negative of an experience the individual had while attending the university (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). The issue with this is that there is not an adequate amount of existing information as to what constitutes a good versus bad experience, without simply asking each former student-athlete. Of the information that is known, however, there are a number of former student-athletes that believe that their contribution to the department came in the form of their participation in their sport (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). To address this incorrect belief, it has been recommended that coaches realize that the environment they provide to their student-athletes has a direct effect on these individuals future charitable giving back to the program (Halpin, 2015).

An important aspect of this particular donor group is the similarity that exists between former student-athletes and student-donors, which can be observed through their parallel mindsets for how they view donating. One of the primary contingencies for obtaining a donation from former student-athletes rests on being able to show them specifically where their financial gift is going (Burchette, 2013). While this was discussed previously, the yearning to know exactly what a donation is going towards for former student-athletes is identical to what student-donors want out of their donation. With that being said, it should be a simple request from former student-athletes, as long as fundraisers can do their part in making sure the donations are marked as "restricted" (used for a specific program) versus "unrestricted" (used wherever needed most). If this can be done then athletic departments will have the opportunity to close the gap that exists between non-student-athlete giving and their production of significantly more donations than that of former student-athlete (Halpin, 2015).

Alumni v. Non-Alumni

As it has been discussed throughout this literature review, in regards to both alumni and non-alumni giving, the ability to purchase seats is one of the top motivational factors for making this transaction happen (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Tsiotsou, 2006). When dealing with non-alumni, the ability to simply purchase seats may still not be enough to secure a donation due to many of these individuals seeking the primary seating options in return for their contribution (Tsiotsou, 2006). To be fair, in most cases, if it wasn't for athletic success

Martinez, Stinson, Kang, & Jubenville (2010) state that non-alumni would not make charitable contributions in support of the program to begin with. For alumni giving, a program's success, specifically winning percentage, was also found in Stinson and Howard's (2008) study, along with how frequent the team received television appearances. These factors align with the self-identification motive that individuals seek that motivate them to donate due to being able to live vicariously through the team's success, and what better way to do that than while the team is playing on national television. It was also discovered that when a universities football program makes the playoffs it leads to an increase in alumni donations but has no effect on non-alumni contributions (Stinson & Howard, 2008).

In an extensive study on alumni and non-alumni donor motives, Gray (2008) found several common occurrences in the answers he received. For starters, in two of three universities, non-alumni rated that improving the student-athletes academic opportunities was their primary motivation, while the third school listed the opportunity to purchase tickets as theirs (Gray, 2008). Next, for the alumni respondents, their main motivation to give varied from improving the football program, improving the athletic department as a whole, and finally improving student-athletes academic opportunities (Gray, 2008). While this cannot necessarily be applied to this study in general, of the three schools that were studied, both alumni and non-alumni agreed that of the options listed, providing student-athletes with better business opportunities was least motivational factor for supporting (Gray, 2008).

However, in acknowledging the similarities and differences in motivational factors for alumni and non-alumni to donate, a study conducted by McEvoy (2002) reminded that prior research has referenced the hypothesized differences in donor motives for both groups. His reference to prior studies is in relation to the misbelief that alumni tend to choose to give for philanthropic reasons, typically in smaller amounts, while non-alumni are willing to give larger amounts for benefits such as better seating and parking at games (McEvoy, 2002). Additional research does need to be conducted to see if there is in fact any hard evidence proving whether or not this assumption is accurate.

Another aspect that has shown to have an effect on non-alumni athletic donations is their ability to receive a tax-deduction (Tsiotsou, 2006). With that being said, receiving a tax deduction on their charitable donation has not been shown to be a determining factor in whether or not the individual gives, but it has played a role in how much they give (Tsiotsou, 2006). Humphreys and Mondello (2007) have also discussed how whether or not all donors in general (alumni and non-alumni) obtain a tax deduction can change the amount of donations a department receives. It should also be known that the concept of receiving a tax deduction was also addressed in Mann (2007) and Gray’s (2009) research, so this factor is one that has been proven to contribute to both alumni and non-alumni athletic giving.

Recent College Graduates

While the level of interaction an individual had during their student years at a university has been yet another area covered extensively for donor characteristics, Terry and Macy (2007) presented an alternate approach. They discussed how the focus should instead be on graduates that feel a greater sense of commitment and responsibility towards the university due to having some form of involvement throughout numerous years post-college. Due to the results of their study they concluded that the individuals who are most involved post-collegiately are actually the most financially supportive donors (Terry & Macy, 2007). Bass (2014) also explained that both loyalty and having a desire to progress the athletic department towards future success represented two of the main motivational factors for recent graduates. But it should be known that no matter how involved an individual was while they were attending the university, one major factor has shown to negatively affect an individual's willingness to give back financially is the high level of debt some of them accumulated while they were students (Terry & Macy, 2007; Baum & O'Malley, 2003).

In building on the financial strain connected to the significant debt that recent graduates accumulated during college, the results from Baum and O'Malley's (2003) study showed that 40% of respondents said they chose less-expensive schools or delayed their enrollment due to their financial restraint. In regards to those that were considering attending graduate school, 42% reported that they had to pass on the opportunity due to the loans they had accumulated as undergraduates (Baum & O'Malley, 2003). The reason that these numbers are important for fundraisers to understand is because the financial stress that individuals with student loans have to deal with can cause them to feel as though it is not their duty to help the current students through donating and instead want them to have to feel the weight of student loans themselves (Terry & Macy, 2007).

But while the debt factor has shown to negatively affect recent graduate donor potential, Meer (2013) again emphasized the fact that it is not about how much a recent graduate gives, it is about getting them in the mindset of simply giving a gift of any amount. What must be done when focusing on recent graduates is creating a habit of giving so that as they progress through the donor lifecycle they transition from making small donations into giving larger ones (Meer, 2013). This idea ties into the belief that an individual’s willingness to participate is a way of predicting their ability and desire to give later on in life (Turner, Meserve, & Bowen, 2001).

The focus of this study was on discovering the primary factors involved in offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics. Throughout the literature review the existing theories of motivation were presented, along with an overview of donor motivations and the background for the varying demographic categories. Each of these areas has now been covered extensively to assist with my research on student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics. Due to the specificity of this investigation, the following research questions have been developed:

RQ1: What factors should be considered when structuring a student-donor membership?

RQ2: How should the benefits offered for a student-donor membership be structured?

RQ3: How should student-donor memberships be branded and communicated?

Chapter 3: Methods

Within this chapter, the process of how the author gathered and evaluated the data necessary to conduct this study will be presented in detail. The primary focus of this study is on current collegiate student-donor memberships that exist within NCAA Division I athletic fundraising and development departments. To assist in further understanding of how these student-donor memberships throughout the nation are structured, ten Division I, Power 5 athletic fundraising and development department student memberships will be discussed. Along with this information, the author will clarify the participants of the study and how these individuals were chosen. Finally, the procedures for how the study was designed, as well as the process the author took to ensure reliability and validity during the examination of the data that was obtained will be explained.

Context

Throughout NCAA Division I collegiate athletic department across the nation, fundraising and development departments oversee the charitable gifts individuals donate that are to be used specifically for athletic purposes. At the University of Kansas (KU), the Williams Education Fund (WEF) is in charge of the process an individual must undergo to become an active member, which then allows them to donate to the athletic department. Once they have become an active donor, they are then eligible to receive the benefits associated with their charitable gift. While the number of donor levels varies within departments across the nation, WEF has a system in place that offers 10 donor categories; each with a required minimum amount an individual must give (Williams Education Fund, 2018). With options ranging from $100-$50,000 a donor selects their level, which then allows them to receive special benefits.

These benefits differ among levels and serve as the incentives for individuals to donate that specific amount.

As was previously presented, the ability to purchase season tickets and priority seating options are two of the primary motives for someone to become a college athletic donor (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Stinson & Howard, 2004). This detail is imperative to understand due to the relationship that exists between priority seating and priority points, with points being accumulated through the amount a donor gives each year. In regards to the WEF (Williams Education Fund, 2018), whether it be an entirely new donation or simply an increase on top of a previous years gift, a donor receives two priority points per $100 donated for all "new money". For individuals that donate the same amount as they did the previous year, they receive one priority point per every $100 they give. Therefore, if you have an individual make a new donation of $25,000, they would receive 500 priority points the first year but then that same gift in each of the following years would only earn them an additional 250 priority points per year. The priority points an individual earns can be accumulated year-after-year and within the structure of the WEF, a donor is ranked first by the level they donate into, followed by the total points they have versus all other members in that category.

When WEF holds their annual "Select-A-Seat" event (May for football and August for basketball), starting with the top ranked donor and then moving down the list, each season ticket holder is given the opportunity to select their location for the seats they have purchased (Williams Education Fund, 2018). Especially for successful programs (such as KU basketball), the primary motive for donating a major gift is to receive a significant point benefit, which provides the individual with the ability to improve their rank for selecting their season ticket seats (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). Due to season ticket priority seating not being relevant for student-donors, the purpose of this study was to discover the primary characteristics associated with student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics.

Student-Donor Memberships

According to the Williams Education Fund (2018), a Williams Education Fund Scholar (WEF Scholar) is a yearly membership offered to any current student at the University of Kansas for an annual fee of $25. The benefits provided to the student-members include 10 priority points (equivalent to what a $1,000 donation would receive) towards future season tickets and if they also purchase an "All-Sports Pack" (football and basketball tickets) the total benefit is valued at $1,500. Additional motivational factors for students to pay for a membership include priority student-tickets for postseason games, a membership packet, as well as invites to special events and tailgates along with all other WEF members.

Preparing to conduct this study began by exploring what other Big XII Conference athletic departments offered their current student donors, which proved beneficial in developing a standard approach for understanding this demographic. At Baylor University (BU), a $60 annual fee was required for any current student wanting to become a member of their "Bear Foundation" (Baylor Bear Foundation, 2016). Once again, the ability to obtain a greater chance of purchasing season tickets after graduation was a leading incentive, along with postseason tickets and special road trip opportunities to those games. One difference between the Bear Foundation and WEF Scholar is that BU provided their student donors will an exclusive "student member-only tailgate at home football games" (Baylor Bear Foundation, 2016).

At Texas Christian University (TCU), they are structured similar to WEF Scholar in that they too provide a $25 current student membership for those wishing to donate to the athletic department. Remaining consistent with its fellow Big XII fundraising and development departments, the incentives of receiving priority points for future tickets, priority post season tickets, and access to exclusive events serve as the incentives. But while TCU, BU, and WEF Scholar have all remained consistent in their attempt to enhance student-donor memberships, Texas Tech University elected to disband their Student Red Raiders Club (SRRC) in 2018-2019 to work on creating a more incentivizing alternative for getting students engaged. The previous year's set-up for the SRRC was a $25 annual membership for current students, but the way they differentiated themselves was that they also offered an $80 option for four-years which saved students $20 (Red Raider Club, 2017).

Procedures and Sample

To understand qualitative research, Patton (2015) discussed how the process is reliant on deciding between conducting personal interviews, directly observing participants, or analyzing written documentation. The choice to construct this study around a qualitative research approach allowed for interviews to serve as the main method for obtaining the necessary information from participants in the most effective and efficient manner. By utilizing this approach the unique feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and emotions of each individual participant could be further explored in far greater depth (Jones & Gratton, 2016).

Selecting to conduct interviews was based on the need to structure strategically prepared questions comprised from the advanced planning done by the researcher in an attempt to avoid obtaining inadequate results (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Conducting interviews also provided the researcher with the ability to further explorer responses than could be done through questionnaires (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Due to the topic of "student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics" being a previously unexplored area, finding motives separate from those standard collegiate athletic donors focus on could provide a unique new insight into charitable giving. In an attempt to ensure the validity for the answers provided, using one-on-one interviews also allows for the interviewer to avoid interpretation of a response by instead verifying the true meaning once it has been given (Kvale, 1988).

In regards to the questions used throughout the interview, the ability for flexibility to be incorporated will be done in an attempt to adhere to the potential varying responses provided by the participants. Maxwell (2013) stated that "The research questions in a qualitative study should not be formulated in detail until the goals and conceptual framework of the design are clarified, and should remain sensitive and adaptable to the implications of other parts of the design" (p. 229). With the purpose of this study on discovering the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics, understanding the relationship (transactional vs. transformational) that exists between a department and their student members serves as a primary goal. Additional topics the interview will focus on include the membership benefits that are offered, best platforms for communicating with members, recruitment tactics, branding and structuring strategies, price points, barriers and challenges, and finally, the goals that each department want to accomplish by offering a student membership. A voice recording will be done for each interview which allows the author to transcribe the discussions at a later time. The interviews will be conducted over the phone, at my house, and last no longer than 30 minutes. Each of the participants will be assigned a fictitious name to ensure that their identities remained anonymous.

The author will use semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1 for interview protocol) which are designed around several main questions that pertain to the topic, but still allow for the freedom of exploring varying responses participants give in greater depth (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). With the emphasis on data saturation leading to effective qualitative research, the author will conduct 10 interviews with the goal of reaching the point of diminishing responses (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). By having this semi-structured format, it will provide the author with the ability to decide whether to allow for questions to be left out or adapted as needed. Rosetto (2014) indicated that with qualitative studies, researchers will "engage in active, supportive listening that involves paraphrasing and probing to develop rapport and encourage in-depth discussion" (p. 483). The questions used within the interview will be developed based on the following four factors: open-ended, neutral, sensitive, and understandable (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The use of open-ended questions will provide the author with the opportunity to ask additional follow-up questions, in an attempt to explore new concepts. Each of the questions asked throughout the interview will pertain to the factors associated with offering student-donor memberships within college athletic departments.

In regards to finding participants to interview, phone calls to the main offices of 10 NCAA Division I fundraising and development funds, that offer student memberships, will be conducted. In asking to be connected with an associate who can speak in-depth on the specifics for how each department's student membership operates, it will ensure that the author receives credible answers to use within this study. Due to sampling bias not existing within qualitative research, qualification and disqualification standards will be developed to ensure valid responses are obtained from participants. Sargeant (2012) discussed that, "subject selection in qualitative research is purposeful; participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 1).

Student memberships that have been offered for at least two years will serve as the ideal departments to interview due to having multiple years of data to reference. An additional requirement for participating in the interview is being an NCAA Division I fundraising and development associate, within the department, who has experience working with the student-donor membership. Due to the need for participants to be current NCAA Division I fundraising and development associates, the author used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling provides convenience and access for researchers to ensuring requirements for a particular situation is being met (Jones & Gratton, 2016).

Data Analysis

For coding purposes DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) stated that, "open coding allows for exploration of the ideas and meaning that are contained in raw data" (p. 139-140). After the initial transcription of the interviews occurred, open coding allowed the author to run through the interviews again, this time forming groups of similar concepts to generate new understandings for the student-donor membership phenomenon (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In addition to this, open coding permitted notes and headings to be incorporated while the author transcribed the data from the interviews (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

However, completion of the analysis for the study was not finalized until common themes had accurately been developed. This meant even though there were only a total of 10 interviews, they had to continue to occur until the author reached satisfaction (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). It should also be understood that the participants of this study may not represent the entire population, due to student memberships not being offered within every collegiate athletic fundraising and development fund. In addition to the phone interviews, secondary research will be done by viewing the official website for each fundraising and development fund that participates in the study. In regards to the approach for conducting the research on student-donor memberships, using a case study approach allowed the author to showcase the real-life scenarios that occur within them (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011). By utilizing the case study approach, having the ability to create the "ideal student-donor membership" would allow for easy-implementation by funds that do not currently offer a student-donor membership. This aligns with how case studies allow for research to be conducted and then produce results that allow sport industry officials to "operate more effectively and efficiently" (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011, p. 130, para. 4).

With reliability and validity being a concern for the author, ensuring that responses were recorded and transcribed correctly was completed through two measures: member checking and categorizing (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers, 2002). While direct quotes were regularly used during the interviews, the author ensured that participants could not be identified through the published data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). To the best of the author's knowledge, the results of this study are both valid and reliable and should be further explored with confidence.

Chapter 4: Results

Following an analysis of the interviews, the author was able to categorize the findings into common themes that will be explained in detail within this section. The results of this study were able to be categorized into five themes, along with various sub-categories. The five themes include: structure, benefits, membership fee, communication, and branding. Below, the details pertaining to each specific theme are illustrated by the author's ability to provide context for the findings, while then validating it with representative quotes.

Structure

For designing a student-donor membership, understanding the factors involved in structuring it for success can be broken-down into three sub-categories: purpose, who is involved, and barriers/challenges. In developing a student-donor membership, the process should begin by deciding what the overall purpose for the membership is going to be. Once this has been decided, figuring out who should oversee it, what potential barriers there are to overcome, as well as selecting the right approach for accomplishing your purpose can be answered.

Purpose. Amongst the collegiate athletic departments that offer student-donor memberships, it is commonly recognized that the membership serves as the first step of a donor's lifecycle, representing a "pipeline" towards future larger donations. By thinking of this in the context of a fundraising question such as, "would you rather have five $1,000 donors or one $5,000 donor?" one purpose for the student membership is revealed. It is about realizing the opportunity to generate additional revenue simply by having more total donors, regardless of their current donation amount. While knowing that in the present, the student-donor membership is not going to move the needle, it is about making an investment for the future of the fund. The statement below sheds light on the previous fictional scenario and explains one funds long-term goal for getting students involved in donating.

> I think it is a good way to see what may be coming down the pipeline. As far as what students' interests are, how involved they are at a younger age, and how long they are involved. Because in the donor lifecycle, people don't just jump in and give transformational gifts. It'll start with a \$50, \$100 gift and those can turn into the \$10,000,000 gifts down the line. If individuals have that affinity, and then later on in life they have that capacity to make those type of transformational gifts, I definitely think it can start from that pipeline beginning as an undergraduate XYZ member.

Now while the statement above illustrates the potential benefits to progressing a student through the donor life-cycle, it is the relationship that is built between a student and the fund that may make the difference. With the student membership not being a revenue generator, athletic annual funds cannot allow a situation to develop where a student pays their membership fee, gets a t-shirt, and then receives an email when it is time for them to renew again. When they graduate college the goal is for them to know exactly what kind of donations are available for them to make, the purpose it serves, and what they can get out of it. Another fundraising associate emphasized the importance of building these relationships by explaining that:

> Most of development shops around the country are looking to grow their base. I really think the premise of it is: how do you build the base? Right? How do you attract the younger generation, how do you *educate* them on what you're trying to do from a philanthropic standpoint and getting them *involved* at an early age? So we slowly integrate them into our membership. That's kind of the reason behind why student groups

> are important to really the long term viability for what we do. A lot of it is just not about the money, it's about *engagement* and *education* for them.

The engagement and educational aspects for building a relationship with students often times come in the form of student involvement, as it pertains to attending sporting events. Through home sporting events, student-donor members are often shown a glimpse into one of the primary "perks" of being a donor to a college athletic fundraising and development department: tickets and seating. Although purchasing season tickets and choosing seat locations are benefits for athletic annual fund donors, student-donors need to know about the process so that they are prepared once they graduate. With them having the convenience of student-section seating while attending the university, the statement below details another funds method for still being able to educate them on what it will take for them to attend games post-graduation.

> The reasoning of "why" would be to add an incentive to get these kids to come to games. It's really just to drive attendance at these games and definitely for football and men's basketball. It's kinda the focus to say: "If you pay $XX annual membership fee or $XX membership fee then depending on what level you want to be at, you're going to be guaranteed certain seats at games", you're going to be guaranteed certain benefits essentially.

Although the goal for engaging with and educating students is for them to see the philanthropic benefits to donating, at 18-21 years old, it takes a very forward-thinker to see how providing scholarships and opportunities for student-athletes is worth them making a donation. Knowing that at this point of their donor lifecycle, the focus may instead need to be on ensuring that they understand that once they become alumni, often times the only way to get season-tickets is by becoming an annual fund donor to athletics.

Who is Involved. In regards to deciding who should oversee and operate the student-donor membership, there are a few ideas to consider. Student-donor memberships are a great deal of work if you truly want to get the full benefit out of them. One issue within athletic fundraising and development departments is they lack an adequate number of staff members to allow for someone to put the necessary time and commitment into the student membership. It is due to this, this question arises as to whether the student membership should be handled internally, partnered with the Alumni Association, or set-up as a Student Organization. Often times Alumni Associations already have “Young Alumni” programs in place to keep students involved after graduation, so the argument can be made that they would be an asset to assisting with operating the student-donor membership. After further research into this topic the general consensus, however, is that the student-donor membership should be operated internally. Below is a statement from one fundraising associate that explained their reasoning:

> So the Alumni Association, we kind of go back-and-forth. They have their own deal. I think it was important to make sure that we distinguish our (Young Alumni program), or the XYZ membership compared to their XYZ (Student Alumni) program. That wasn’t easy and it’s still not. So that’s an issue. I think it’s distinguishing the difference.

By keeping the student-donor membership operated internally, fundraising and development departments can ensure that the membership is staying consistent with the goals and expectations of the regular athletics annual fund. The ability to align the student-donor membership with an athletic annual fund was confirmed by the quote below:

> I think it’s an extension of the annual fund, rather than something that is parallel or different for just students. But I also get a lot of help from marketing (Athletic

> Department). Marketing has helped a bunch too. It’s very much a collaborative effort, which is good, because I wouldn't’ be able to do this all myself.

By looking at what an athletic annual fund wants out of their student membership, it must be understood that the Alumni Association oversees the donations for the entire university, while the annual fund is strictly for those donors giving to the athletic department. Another fundraising associate again confirmed this argument for keeping the student-donor membership internal by stating that:

> I think it depends what your ultimate goal is. It makes the most sense, for us, to have it within athletics. Just because when we try to recruit people to give after they have graduated we want to already have that relationship with them. So from that standpoint I think it makes the most sense for athletics to do it.

The last option for having the student-donor membership can be done by setting it up as a student organization. The issue with student organizations though is that they operate under the entire university which means an athletic department would no longer have complete control over the student-donor membership. A donor database would then be accessible by outside parties who may not understand how to properly deal with donors. With that being said, while student organizations do provide opportunities for student involvement the statement below better explains the issue:

> I think student-run organizations are great for attendance to athletic events and things like that. Really having a strong student group that promotes certain games and stuff like that and kinda creates a better culture within athletics here. I think that’s great, but we are really focused on what happens after you graduate.

However, even though having the student-membership set-up as a student organization produced little results, a popular addition to athletic annual funds is having a “Student Board Committee”. These committees are designed to incorporate students into the department to work strictly with the student membership. This process of having a Student Board Committee is detailed below:

> We have a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, all those types of things, we have six committee members and they are an official student-run organization of the University and our president, she handles all the affairs. Myself and one other individual in our office are the liaisons and oversee the things that they do and make sure things run smoothly. But for the most part they come up with all the ideas, they do the different events, and they do the different outreach to get people involved, so I know it’s grown from just one person in our office trying to get people involved, to having an entire committee member team to push it forward.

These Student Board Committees assist in growing and helping design the membership by providing a student's perspective on all matters concerning the student membership. The idea of using a Student Board Committee as liaisons to the student organizations around campus makes complete sense when you break it down. Having students within the fund who can discuss the specifics of the student-donor membership with other student organizations allow for more groups to be reached. With time always being a key factor in operating a student-donor membership, having more able-bodies to speak directly with each organization could result in increased memberships. Instead of having the fundraising associate who oversees the membership trying to reach to all student organizations, adding that personal touch of sending in students to speak to them directly is a unique approach.

Barriers and Challenges. When deciding whether or not to offer a student-donor membership, college athletic fundraising and development departments should be aware of the barriers and challenges they may face. These barriers and challenges can range from generating enough awareness, advancing the membership, getting in-house buy-in, and getting students to see the perceived benefits for becoming a member. A fundraising associate presented the current issue with generating awareness in the quote below:

> I would say the biggest challenge is just getting in front of students. We do a good job of having a presence at summer orientation and grad fairs, but we do not see them too much outside of that. They are busy and spread out, so it is often hard to get a large group of students in the same spot throughout the year. Sometimes, we will go the student basketball ticket line and hand out flyers and talk to students to have more of a presence. We try our best to get in front of them and sometimes it's tough. You also don't always have access to their (students) information.

Unlike with an athletic annual fund, fundraising associates have to go to where the students are, they cannot rely on students coming to them. When working with regular annual fund donors, these individuals understand that to get season tickets and good seat locations they must make a donation. For students, finding that motivational factor for getting them to join the student-donor membership versus another student organization is crucial. Another associate highlighted this situation below:

> There's a lot of people competing for their time and their dollar. Think about all of the different student organizations that are on campus. Whether it's, fraternities/sororities, and beyond that to different clubs and stuff. They have a lot of distractions. Why should

> they support this initiative? And I think you have to make a strong case for that, and that's tough.

Being able to generate awareness and advance the membership stems from a funds ability to successfully highlight the value of the student-donor membership, which is not an easy task. Between increasing student-fees and the general financial restraints of being a college student, justifying the value will arguably be the greatest challenge a fund will face. In terms of what one department sees as the biggest challenge they face, the statement below details their struggle:

> Perceived value. Why do I need to do this? And making a case for the importance. There's the one thing we hear a lot, whether it's student groups, or young alumni, is 'I don't have a lot of money. I'm a student'. The thing that's probably the biggest barrier is the financial piece. You and I know that, these students, most of them, if you said, 'don't have a cup of coffee for 5 weeks, and then take that money and join this', it's not that they can't necessarily afford it, it's the perception of having to give to something to get something in addition to something they feel like they are already entitled to.

The issue with overcoming the perceived value challenge is that this is a barrier a fund must face each year while a student is in college. The challenges for generating awareness and advancing the membership will happen naturally through fundraising associates ability to show students the perceived value in becoming a member. This perceived value barrier that arises from the student-donor membership goes much deeper than simply convincing a student to become a member as a freshman, which one associate alluded to below:

> How do the benefits actually motivate a student to give up $20 to become a member, because financial, just the economics of it, college students are a very tricky group to go after, very naturally there. $20 goes a long way as a college student, so how do you create

> benefits for them and experiences and exclusive access and what-not that appeals for them to decide to be a member? Then once you've gotten to them for that first time, how do we keep them for all four years and keep that relationship alive?

The argument can be made that the challenges with generating awareness, advancing the membership, and showing the perceived value of the membership can all be overcome through the fourth barrier, getting in-house buy-in. It is common for athletic annual funds to focus on how they will highlight the value of a membership to potential donors, but in some cases more attention may be needed on showing those within the department its benefit. Again, it comes down to how much time is available for athletic fundraising associates to put into realizing the long-term results for offering a student-donor membership. The quote below speaks on the type of situation that you don't want to have within your department:

> I think the biggest barrier is buy-in. You also need to have staff buy-in too, as in 'this is important and we need to sit down and get this done' whether it's something as simple as creating lists or whatever it is. The biggest issue too is having it as an afterthought. You don't want to make it an afterthought.

At the end of the day, if an athletic annual fund is going to offer a student-donor membership then they must give it the attention and time it deserves. The students on campus have the potential to become life-time donors but only if fundraising departments make them a priority. If a fund is going to make a student-donor membership an afterthought, while failing to properly educate and show value in the donor-relationship being built, then it may be in their best interest to not offer a membership at all.

Therefore, in connecting the factors associated with structuring a student-donor membership, the majority of college athletic annual funds believe that it should: serve as a pipeline for getting students involved, focus on the challenge of getting in-house buy-in to generate awareness and grow the membership, and finally, operate internally while incorporating a Student Board Committee.

Benefits

When it comes to deciding on the benefits that will be offered within a student-donor membership, it is important that what you provide also builds recognition amongst members so they understand that their membership is a branch of the athletics' annual fund. In reference to connecting the membership benefits a fund offers with their purpose, four sub-categories emerged to be further explored. These sub-categories include transformational vs. transactional, tangible benefits, experiences, and priority points. Although priority points are technically considered a tangible benefit, the author felt the need present the topic as its own sub-category due to the transitional aspect of the benefit being in-place to motivate donors to continue making an annual donation. With all three types of benefits serving a purpose, a fundraising associate make the following comment about the general process of choosing which benefits a student-donor membership should offer.

> When we develop different benefits we always want to think about what goes back to our purpose. So anytime that we think of a benefit we try to circle back to 'how is that connected to our purpose?' 'How is that educating our members and letting them know what the XYZ does?' So when they leave here, they go, "I have to be a XYZ member". It is that transition piece that we really, really are working on right now and okay, we've got these great benefits but what are benefits or education pieces that we can offer at those so they know what we do and why we do it?

Although each athletic annual fund has a different purpose for the role the student membership serves, it is about offering benefits that will help to accomplish it. If an annual fund wants students to think of their membership as a way to help student-athletes, then benefits that involve game-day activities, meet-and-greets, and bringing attention to the financial assistance students are providing to the student-athletes need to be offered. On the other hand, if the goal is on showing them what it is like to be an athletic annual fund member, it would be wise to offer benefits that bring both them and annual fund donors together, such as tailgates and hospitality rooms. Within the sections below the author has provided an in-depth description of the different types of benefits that can be offered in a student-donor membership.

Transactional vs. Transformational. A key concept that student-donor membership must decide between is having a transactional or transformational approach. Having a transactional approach refers to seeing the student-donor membership for what it is in the present: a student donating a small membership fee to receive a benefit that they otherwise wouldn't have access to. This process occurs due to a student deciding that the benefits that they will receive are worth the membership fee. It is all about personal gain rather than how their money helps accomplish a bigger purpose. This type of exchanges is not made so that they can be educated on where their donation will go or how it matters; it is simply to receive something for their money. This concept of a transactional approach is re-stated below:

> So for this group I would say it's more transactional than transformational, because again, just to get them in the door and be members it does need to be a 'well what's in it for me?' type of build there.

With that being said though, funds can also structure their membership with transactional approach but then incorporate the transformational aspects into it as the relationship between the annual fund and student-donor progresses. To better understand what makes something "transformational", think of it as the effect that will occur due to an action being taken. In terms of donating, a donor who has a "transformational" approach donates their money to accomplish a bigger purpose, such as helping pay student-athlete scholarships, build new facilities, or provide extra funding to advance a program. When it comes to connecting students with the transformational affect their donation can have one associate made the following statement:

> I don't think students are necessarily at the point in their lives to have a, in their minds, a transformational impact giving at such a small level. I think it has to start transactional and that's how you build the relationship and eventually, if you do a good job in creating that relationship with transactional membership benefits, eventually it will turn into transformational. But just at the price point they are giving at (now) and the benefits they receive, I would say it is definitely transactional.

The comment above displays the idea of having a transactional approach, but while also laying the groundwork for transitioning into a transformational approach as the student progresses through their donor lifecycle. Creating a balance between having a transactional and transformational approach allows for the student-donor membership to achieve two different goals. The first goal is to adhere to what the student-donor want now from their membership, which is what they will receive in exchange for their money. The second goal is to providing just enough information on the transformational effect of the donation to get them thinking about the difference their donation is making. Another fundraising associate discussed their view on having a transformational approach below.

> When I think of transformational these are people, from a development perspective, that are impacting your program at a very high level. Right now, it's not transformational in

> the sense that they're having a huge impact. But it is, they're part of a greater mission and that is, we've got to build the base and get them involved. Because historically speaking, most development shops around the country that have donors, their donor pool is from 40-70 (years old) and probably even 50-70, are the people that give the majority of the money. How do you build that base? That base comes from young alumni, it comes from students.

While the argument for having a transactional or transformational approach does lean more towards the former of the two, there are funds that have been successful in focusing on the transformational aspects. Although it may not be the easiest approach to take, to be successful at setting up a student membership as transformational requires strong relationships to be built between fundraising associates and their student-donors. By not pushing the idea of what the students can receive by donating and instead, the impact they can make relies on fundraisers getting students to feel personally responsible for something bigger than themselves. Below is a quote from an associate whose student membership is more transformational-focused.

> It's definitely more transformational. It's a $XX membership so we're not really thinking about the dollars on it, it's more about "can we get them to see the big picture on this, why it's important to give back, and what athletics does for the university." It's more about getting them through the door. So for us it's more relationship-driven.

When it comes time for fundraisers to decide between having a transactional or transformational approach, it is important to ensure that the benefits chosen align with it. Whether there is a heavy focus on tangible benefits, experiences, or priority points, the following sections highlight those that have been successfully used by other athletic annual funds who offer student-donor memberships.

Tangible Benefits. With many athletic annual funds having a transactional approach where students pay a membership fee for the sole purpose of receiving something in exchange, they must take this into account when selecting the benefits they will offer. Their process of choosing membership benefits often begins with what tangible items they will provide. With a student membership offering tangible items, fundraising associates must think of what they will offer as an "exchange" between them and their student-donors. Amongst most departments, the general consensus for a tangible item is a t-shirt.

> So every year we are just switching colors around but the idea is you create a brand that you see people walking around in. There's a big '17, big '18, big '19, whatever it is and you can collect each year.

The quote above shows one athletic annual funds ability to take the common t-shirt benefit and turn it into a collector's item. By simply offering a t-shirt that makes students say "hey, I have the first two or three, might as well get the fourth", it has resulted in increased awareness for the membership and helped grow their student base. However, while t-shirts are a great tangible item, any type of team-gear can be offered as long as it is visible to the public. Everything apparel-related needs to be used in a way that students feel like they received something that they could not have gone out and bought in a store, while also bringing attention to the athletic annual fund and student membership. Another fundraising associate spoke on the way they made sense of the decision to offer tangible benefits below:

> You're always going to learn towards what nice, new, clean swag item can we give to incentivize kids to join this year or to renew their membership for the year? So I would say we kinda lean heavily on an actual tangible benefit rather than like seating options, experience options. We are pulled in so many different directions there that we obviously

> have our students, you have your group sales that you want to do, you want to take care of all those people, you want to take care of your older donors, so I think it leans more towards an item, or you give a lanyard, or some sweatpants or what-not.

At the end of the day, one way for deciding what tangible items to offer within a student membership is to “keep it simple-stupid” This means offering an incentive that makes students feel like their money went towards something they can keep, but also using that benefit for a personal purpose as a way to generate awareness.

Experiences. Of the different student membership benefits, it is more popular for athletic annual funds to focus on the experiences that they can provide to students. The reasoning for this is because most of these experiences do not cost them anything at all. It is about providing the students with the ability to have exclusive access to an experience that they otherwise would not be able to have. The quote below depicts the experience benefits that one fund offers.

> Now a couple of things we do, we do exclusive private practices with our head coaches. What that means is our students get to come in to a behind-the-scenes look at an actual practice and we also try and try them a tour of the facility and get the behind-the-scenes look that a normal students wouldn’t get. So at the end of practice they’ll have the opportunity to shake hands and take pictures with the head coach and get that one-on-one experience.

Fundraising associates need to emphasize the “exclusiveness” of each experience they offer as a benefit if they want it to attract students. This all relates back to the same conversation that occurs when trying to get people to attend events in general. When offering an experience, it has to be worth more than the other options that are available for them to choose. Especially with students, provide them with something that helps make them standout from their peers and if it can include a photo opportunity, even better. This concept is highlighted by the quote below from another associate who spoke on one of their main experience benefits that their fund offers.

> Our next idea is creating a chance for them to come on the field a take pictures on their graduation weekend in December. People just go weird about this football field. If you can give them access to it, that's something that doesn't cost us anything and makes us look good.

Now while the statement above may not provide much context on the surface for any new ground-breaking opportunities, it sheds light on how one department has crafted a benefit to fit specifically into what will get students to become members. Not every department is going to have a football stadium or basketball arena that students want behind-the-scenes access to, so it is important to find what that specific experience is that will motivate them towards creating a membership. However, even though a behind-the-scene tour may not be enough of a motivational experience, combining it with an activity that the students would be doing anyway, such as watching an away game, might.

> We pick one of our bigger away football game each year and host a game watch in one of our stadium clubs, just for our members. That is a complimentary to them as members of that club, to come to that event, so we do a few social events like that.

In addition to the experiences listed above, to ensure confidentiality, the author will speak in general terms on several more benefits athletic annual funds offer. In some cases where sell-outs for students attending home conference sporting events occur, providing student-donor members with the ability to have early-access to purchasing their tickets has been a popular incentive.

Another benefit is allowing early-entry for members and even having their entry gate separate from the other students who are non-members.

Priority Points. For those unaware of the process of an athletic annual fund offering priority points, the idea is to provide donors with the ability to accumulate points that then allow them to receive better incentives, such as season tickets, better seat locations, etc. These points carry-over from year to year and a point scale exists within each department to show their break-down for how more can be earned. For instance, in some departments a fund may provide two points for every $100 a person donates, so if someone gives $500 then they receive 10 points. In regards to student memberships, one fundraising associate illustrated their current situation:

> So each year before you graduate you can accumulate five points and those priority points help to go along with your rank and your opportunity to purchase season tickets once you graduate. So five priority points is equivalent to $250, it's a really good opportunity for our students to accumulate priority points without having to give that money so by the time you graduate, if you're a four year XYZ member you will basically have $1,000 in cumulative giving from giving $100.

By having priority points as a benefit within a student membership, it begins transitioning the students into thinking of their overall donor rank, as well as how their points will translate into their future season-ticket seating location. Once again though, the focus at this present time is not on leading with the idea of how it will help them get better season tickets once they graduate.

Membership Fee

After analyzing the transcriptions and conducting further research, it was found that there is no "right" membership fee to charge for a student-donor membership. The range of the results varied from $25-$200, depending on the department. The fact of the matter is, this is not a revenue generating membership. It is about engaging with, educating, and getting students involved, so therefore the focus needs to be on finding a price cheap enough to where students will not hesitate to join. With that being said, no department wants to lose money by offering the student membership, so finding a price point that aligns with the benefits that are offered should be each funds ultimate goal.

> So that ($25) price point is obviously working for a lot of students. I don't think we have enough benefits right now to provide a reason to increase the number or the membership price, just because, like I said, we try to use it as a pipeline. It's not like we are really trying to generate revenue off of this membership group, we are really just trying to promote this culture of giving to XYZ Athletics and so they are more comfortable in doing that once they've graduated.

The statement above demonstrates one department recognizing that if they were to increase their membership fee, for students to still join more benefits would have to be offered. Measuring how much money a fund is spending on the benefits that are offered within the student membership is a cost-effective approach for ensuring that a fund is at least breaking-even. Especially with most student memberships not raising a large amount of revenue, funds definitely do not want to be losing money by offering one. As was previously discussed, membership t-shirts can serve as a great tangible item that students "purchase" through their membership fee but if a fund has a more expensive fee then additional benefits must also be offered. If experiences are the primary benefit but a student cannot attend them, they may feel their membership fee is not going towards anything. At the end of the day it is about weighing what benefits are offered compared to the membership fee, which was emphasized by the following quote:

> Simple as looking at the price for what we are doing. Of course you want to do valued received but we came to the conclusion that we want to be cheap, for lack of a better word, we want to look easy, 'oh, only $XX'. I think we started at $XX and then realized that we just needed to bump it up $5 to make it $XX after seeing some of the end results. We always try to raise $100,000 profit at the end of the year.

What the quote above teaches is that at first, by selecting a cheaper price, departments then have the ability to increase or decrease their fee once they have a better idea for how it aligns with the benefits they provide.

Communication

For fundraising and development departments, communicating with their annual fund donors is far different from how they must reach both their current and potential student-donor members. In regards to communicating with annual fund donors, the process has historically been done through phone calls, face-to-face meetings, mailings, with email beginning to grow in popularity. However, for the student-donor membership, the process for analyzing the communication data was done by the author creating three sub-categories: platforms, recruitment, and upperclassmen. The three sub-categories are explained below.

Platforms. This concept can be summed up as "go where your audience is". This means, that if an annual fund is working with generating interest from its student members then phone calls are not an effective method to use. Utilizing multiple platforms also extends the range of who sees the messages and posts that are released. While there is still a heavy focus on emails, several new platforms that a fundraising associate utilizes for their student-donor memberships can be seen in the statement below:

> Mostly through social media and email. We have Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts and then once individuals give us their email and become members, and we have them on our XYZ listserv, we will send out emails about the different events that we have going on throughout the year. So most of the communication comes through email and we encourage them to of course follow our social media platforms because that's how most people communicate and interact these days.

While the previous response is from a heavy-user of communication tactics, athletic annual funds must be still be selective on what platforms they utilize, as well as how frequent they reach-out to their student members. For instance, if a fund decides to tweet about a specific event, then it is ill-advised to release the exact same message on another platform. Cross-posting is an easy way to lose the interest of the younger generation, as is email-blasting. While both are common mistakes, the latter of the two is illustrated in the statement below:

> Email works the best. I try to leave it to twice a semester, as far as emails. I don't want to bog them down or ever come to the point where they want to hit "unsubscribe". I do not use constant contact to communicate with them. I don't want to get to that point where they're like "man, they're just spamming me or they're just hitting me up". Usually it's a "thank you for joining" in the fall and then a "fall events schedule". So we'll send out, we usually do three-to-four events a year, I'll send one email like that that describes all of the events that we'll be at. So that's two emails in the first semester and then in the spring I'll send an email with our "spring schedule" and then a "renewal email", something like "hey, please renew with us". So you're getting four emails a year.

Recruitment. In attempting to reach new students for joining a student-donor membership there are several approaches that departments have taken. While there is no "right" way to recruit new members, the most successful method has been for fundraising departments to have a presence at Student Orientations that take place throughout the summer. These orientations are great opportunities to connect with a large amount of incoming freshmen, as well as their parents, to educate them on the benefits of the membership. In taking the freshmen orientation recruitment approach a step further, one department didn't want to rely solely on themselves for being the only one there to get their membership information out.

> I work closely with the orientation leaders too, so that when people are asking questions about football tickets… I'll take the orientation leaders up to the (football stadium) and give them a dinner and the marketing department and we'll talk to them about the rewards program. I'll talk about the XYZ membership, and then when students or parents are asking "hey, how can I get football season-tickets?" they can say "here's how you do it, also don't forget to join the XYZ membership because it gets you three extra points right off the bat". So that's how we recruit new members.

For most departments, it is simply about having a presence at the places large amounts of students will be. It is about catching them while they are new to campus and still excited about getting involved at the university. Especially when a student is with their parents, fundraisers need to use the initial excitement that parents and students have towards being involved to their advantage. While there is nothing complex about simply being where the students are, it is best depicted by the following quote:

> Career fairs, student orientation at the beginning of the year, just being visible and being active in terms of them knowing that you have a presence out there. Back to tabling at career fairs and job fairs, anything that would have a strong student presence is important.

Although there are a few methods that are not common practices, approaches such as having the student-donor membership attached to the student's season-ticket sports application and promoting exclusive events to non-members have both been known to work. Likewise, the quote below references another unique way to recruiting new student-donor members:

> Here with us we have a bunch of different student-run organizations, just like a lot of other universities. So our team is working on creating a liaison board between those other student organizations. Whether it be mostly the athletics student-organizations, but even some of the others, to even try and get one person involved there, who can be the liaison between us and their student organization. Their job would be to influence individuals from their group to look into joining the XYZ as well.

Upperclassmen. With many of the previous approaches for recruiting new members having been created with the intention of reaching freshmen, the question of what is being done to recruit new upperclassmen must be asked. With that being said, one fundraising associate referenced the issue of upperclassmen already having their game-day routines, while another spoke instead on their renewal approach below:

> For sophomore, juniors, seniors, we do the same tactics that we do with the freshman. We have a presence on campus, they get the same notification email, and we already have that data from them. We reach out to them and say "hey, it's time to renew your membership". We also, this spring, are going to have a big re-up week where if you renew your membership be a certain point we're going to do something like a watch party in the football stadium or an exclusive event that they wouldn't normally have access to if they renew early.

By realizing the apparent trouble with recruiting new upperclassmen to become members, this uncovers an additional barrier/challenge that may have been previously known by many athletic fundraising associates. As funds move forward exploring this new challenge, the belief of “it takes more money to get a new member than it does to retain an old one”, should be avoided due to the future potential these members still have as they continue to progress through their donor lifecycle.

Branding

The final category to report on involves the strategies that NCAA athletic fundraising and development departments put into effect for branding their student-donor membership. For some, the focus has been on creating a brand that stands alone and functions separately from an athletic department’s annual fund. Others, however, have realized the benefit in aligning the membership as a branch of the annual fund, which once again creates the idea of a “pipeline”. As a result of these ideas, the author was able to form two sub-categories: engagement and extension of the annual fund. The details pertaining to these two concepts are further examined below.

Engagement. For some student-donor memberships, branding it on the framework of supporting and being involved at athletic events has been a successful approach. It is about providing students with a place to experience the same electric atmosphere that they see on ESPN where student sections are going wild with support for their team. Although not all schools require their students to become student-donor members to purchase student-section tickets, student memberships should be branded as a way for members to be even more connected to athletics. Athletic annual funds need to remember that some fans live vicariously through their team’s success that has been proven as a motivating factor for them choosing to donate. This idea of having a place for students to be part of an exciting and interactive fan base is not an uncommon method to use and is further explained by the quote below:

> It's a way to lock in those kids that are really passionate about supporting our teams, love it here on campus, being at the games, and having a loud presence. For the students, in my perspective, it's developing a strong fan base at our home events. "Hey, you gave $25 or $50 that's awesome, now here's a t-shirt, we want you to come out and be loud, but we want you to be respectful, come early, come often."

The comment above displays one fundraising associate's outlook on branding the student-donor membership. It should be noted that the engagement strategy, especially for programs with highly successful sports programs, assists in forming the "affiliation" factor that has proven to motivate individuals to make donations.

Extension of the Annual Fund. Designing a brand that can be recognized as an extension of the annual fund allows both current and potential student-donor members to understand the link between the two. For college athletic fundraising and development departments, this is an easy way to paint an actual picture of the "pipeline" that exists between the student and annual membership. A fundraising associate illustrated this idea with the statement below:

> We ultimately wanted to go hand-in-hand with the XYZ. Our logo is the same, shield is the same that the XYZ uses, it's just a different color and has our words in it. So the brand recognition is to make sure that our XYZ logo is on everything because if you've seen the XYZ logo then you'll recognize it or associate it with the regular XYZ.

However, while aligning the student-donor membership brand exactly like the annual fund works for some, others have found more success in adding a creative touch to it. It is about building a brand that is consistent with the athletic annual fund, but by adding a creative aspect to meet the students' needs, which aligns directly with the *relationship-marketing theory*. In building a strong brand, while also providing satisfaction to the student-donor, it strengthens the relationship between both parties. The statement listed below illustrates this strategy:

> Our biggest brand point is we want to stay on brand with the actual XYZ (annual fund). We don't want them to feel like a different entity because they are still a part of the XYZ family. So I think that if there were a difference it would be in tailoring the events that we do, the t-shirt we provide, to the actual college student. That's where the different brand comes in, instead of "oh, let's just throw our XYZ logo on there". Well they don't think that's hip right now, they don't want to wear that across their chest. It's figuring out a different way to stay true to the actual XYZ brand and the family, but in the same aspect, in a creative aspect, it's making sure that it's what the college student wants to see.

Having the proper balance of a student brand being similar enough to the athletic annual fund's so that brand recognition can occur, but also different enough to attract students is an on-going process for fundraisers. In addition to this, involving the athletic marketing and communication departments would allow for outside ideas to be generated on the best image, color, and message to use to making the student membership stand out, while also staying on-brand with the athletic annual fund.

The different concepts that were presented in this study were done to better understand the phenomenon of student-donor memberships. They were able to be discussed in great detail due to the author interviewing NCAA Division I fundraising and development associates who work, or have worked, with student-donor memberships. At the conclusion of the interview process the categories of: structure, benefits, membership fee, communication, and branding became the themes that would be further explored. The results of this study and research questions listed above helped the author develop the introductory research into student-donors.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics. Within this chapter, the author was able to connect the research questions and past literature with the five major themes derived from the study's results. In addition to this, the author also explained the practical implications for the research, the study's limitations, and four areas of future research to consider.

In the past, when developing the framework for the lifecycle of a donor, it was not common practice for those in their first few years after graduating college to donate and even if they did, the donation would be small (Tom & Elmer, 1994). Often times, a donor's progression towards making a significant donation wouldn't even occur until 10-20 years after they had graduated (Tom & Elmer, 1994). It is a result of this belief that one of the primary objectives for this study was to create the "ideal" student-donor membership and show the benefits for beginning a donor's lifecycle while they are still students attending a university.

The first major theme of this study was on how to properly structure a student-donor membership. The main reasons for annual funds to offer the student membership included "donor pipeline" and "student involvement", which allowed the author to align each motives to the previous literature that was conducted by Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995). Within the study, altruism, reciprocity, and direct benefits are presented as the primary motives for getting individuals to donate (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995). With "donor pipeline" relating to altruism and "student involvement" connecting to direct benefits, implementing this approach to student memberships addressed two key areas for motivating individuals to donate. Pomazal and Jaccard (1976) illustrated the altruistic, also known as transformational, concept of charitable giving by stating that an individual simply knowing they were helping someone would not be sufficient enough for motivating them to donate. The reason this should be considered when working specifically with students is due to them being around the same age as the college athletes who are benefiting from their donation. However, by also focusing on the direct benefits, the motivation an individual has towards receiving an advantage simply by being a member of the group is addressed (Stinson & Howard, 2004). This information is relevant for the structuring of a student membership because the altruistic focus meets the transformational need of the athletic annual fund, while the direct benefits adhere to the transactional relationship that the results of this study have shown students desire.

One of the sub-categories to structuring a student-donor membership, who should oversee it, further builds on developing the tangible versus transformational balance through the relationship-marketing theory discussed by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, (2002). Overall, fundraising associates agreed that the student membership should be operated internally, within their athletic annual fund. By doing so, associates are able to ensure that the student membership stays consistent with the goals that they wanted it to accomplish. In terms of "goals", even though student-donor memberships do not generate large amounts of revenue in the present, the concept of relationship-marketing connects to how profitable something is (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). Although when it comes to measuring the profitability of a student membership, fundraising associates have to look at it long-term by seeing what student-donors then transition into the athletic annual fund to continue donating. By tying this back to the "pipeline" concept, looking at this again through the lens of the relationship-marketing theory allows for a more in-depth analysis into understanding the cause-and-effect relationship that results from an action being taken due to the influence of a specific driver (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). It is through relationship marketing that a fundraiser works to find the motivational factors that will produce donor loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). Whether a student-donor is more satisfied by what benefits they receive through continuing to donate (relational benefits approach) or rather the impact they are making by donating (relationship quality approach), this information can help associates know which fundraising strategy to implement as they work toward building a lasting relationship (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). The benefits to knowing these key drivers allow for the advancement of the relationship that exists between a fundraising associate and a donor to occur through the process of “mutual satisfaction” (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Again, this idea of “mutual satisfaction” (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999) was confirmed by the findings within this study. These findings showed that fundraising associates want there to be a greater emphasis on educating students about the transformational impact a donation makes, which was confirmed by previous literature on donor motives showing altruism as a key driver for obtaining an individual's financial support (Mann, 2007; Sanders & Tamma, 2015; Stinson & Howard, 2010). With that being said, this study also produced results showing that fundraising associates believe that their student-donors are more concerned with the transaction and what specific tangible or experience benefits they will receive. This finding also pertains to interview question nine, as it answers the question of whether student-donor memberships should be more transactional or transformational.

Another structural finding that was presented throughout this specific study was athletic annual funds implementing a Student Board Committee to assist with the student-donor membership. This idea developed from fundraising associates realizing that for them to fully address each factor involved with structuring a successful student membership, students perspectives on each matter had to be taken into account. What this new information adds is that by using a Student Board Committee, many fundraising associates believe that by having current students on their team, it will provide the necessary insight into addressing the challenges and barriers faced in structuring a student-donor membership. By looking at this in the context of the undergraduate recruitment tactics universities use, Student Ambassadors provide personal experiences to prospective students so they can know whether they would be a good fit or not (Kay, Rhodes, Heinzman, & Lees, 2018). Another approach that a college nursing program used to incorporate Student Ambassadors into their recruitment process was done by having them meet one-on-one with students. In doing this, the Student Ambassadors could answer any questions the prospective student had, while also putting them at ease on any inaccurate beliefs they may have about the program (Rhodes, Sherwin, & Smith, 2006). In applying these strategies to student-donor memberships, Student Board Committee members can speak to prospective student-donors about the membership from a fellow-students perspective. Student Board Committee members could also help prospective students overcome any misconceptions they may have that by showing a desire and ability to donate, they would then be expected to make a large donation (Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003).

When it came to understanding the specific challenges and barriers for structuring a student membership, the issues of generating awareness, getting in-house buy-in, and advancing the membership were all able to be connected to the fourth challenge, showing the perceived value of the membership. With it being the job of the fundraising associates to show the value of the student membership, the situation relates back to the research on the relationship quality approach discussed by Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990). Within this approach, a salesperson works to eliminate the concerns of a potential buyer, while also meeting their requirements, which results in an agreement to purchase. By connecting this belief to the study conducted by

Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990), a fundraising associate must assure a student that the price for the student membership, along with the benefits that they will receive, does outweigh what they are giving up outside of the membership. Kwon, Trail, and James (2007) also presented on the idea of measuring the perceived value of something by referencing an individual who goes through the process of comparing what they are giving up for what they are getting out of a purchase. Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo (2007) further explored the concept of how perceived value applies to an individual's decision making process by explaining that the determining factors include the total price, the benefits that will be received, the quality of those benefits, as well as what else they must give up to receive it. Reflecting back on the Kwon, Trail, and James (2007) study, their attempt at calculating the likelihood of an individual buying licensed merchandise of a sports team resulted in the determining factors being: perceived value and the level to which they identified with the team. How the Kwon, Trail, and James (2007) study can be applied to student-donor memberships still relates to the perceived value of the purchase, but also incorporates the level of identification a prospective donor may have with an athletic program. For those that identify highly with an athletic program, they may have additional motivation toward joining a student-donor membership that allows for a more personal relationship to exist.

In understanding the need for a donor's concerns to be eliminated and their requirements to be met, having the necessary in-house buy-in will ultimately determine whether or not this process is successful. For those that lack the necessary in-house support, failing to provide adequate time for deciding what benefits to offer will result in failing to address students' main concern. If the concerns of the students are not met, overcoming the challenges of showing the perceived value and advancing the student membership will also not be accomplished. This belief aligns with the study conducted by Gipp, Kalafatis, and Ledden (2008) where they explained that the concept of perceived value consists of what someone receives in exchange for what they give-up. However, fundraising associates working with student-donor memberships are tasked with not only having to show student-donors the perceived value in monetary terms, but in nonmonetary terms as well (Gipp, Kalafatis, & Ledden, 2008). What this means is that showing the perceived value in monetary terms applies to the donation a student-donor makes to receive a benefit, while the nonmonetary factor is in reference to the time and energy they must also give up. The concept of time was also presented by Lapierre (2000), who went as far as to refer to it as the most important factor consumers consider when measuring what they are giving up by making a purchase. With their donation going toward them being able to receive a benefit, if the benefits that are offered also require a time commitment, such as attending an event, this then becomes a second perceived value barrier for prospective student-donors with busy schedules.

In building on student membership benefits, this concept presented itself as the second theme from the results of this study. The benefits theme within student memberships was in relation to interview question two and aimed to answer whether offering tangible items versus experiences was the appropriate approach. The previous research existing on athletic annual fund membership benefits was focused heavily on priority seating options for annual fund donors, along with better parking, special access to events, and public recognition (Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Park, Jae Ko, Kim, Sagas, & Eddosary, 2016). While the correlation between priority seating and priority points has been used primarily with annual fund members, this study produced results showing that fundraising associates find it beneficial to offer priority points to student-donor members. The study conducted by Delich, (2004) explained the priority point process as: "A system utilized by collegiate athletic departments to systematically assign season tickets (typically for men's football and basketball) to donors. The more points accumulated by the donor, the more preferred the seating location" (p. 21). However, due to athletic departments often offering specific student-section ticket locations at games, the goal for providing student-donor members with a benefit designed to help them purchase better season tickets post-graduation is preparing them for their transition into the annual fund. The main reason for this is simply to get them thinking about the relationship that exists between making a donation, the points they receive from a donation, where their points rank them overall, and the location of their season-ticket seating that their rank and point total will result in.

In terms of the most referenced donor benefits for student memberships, fundraising associates have shifted their focus to offering experiences. These associates stated that the reasoning behind selecting the experience approach was due to the benefits not costing them anything. In the current study, the experience benefits ranged from facility tours, to attending closed practices, to having the ability to take graduation photos at the football stadium, and even being invited to watch parties in a donor suite. The exclusiveness of the experiences is consistent with the Park, Jae Ko, Kim, Sagas, and Eddosary (2016) study that connected this donor motive with the affiliation and loyalty individuals feels as a result of making a donation.

Another belief is that a person's interests are stimulated by receiving experiences that bring them pleasure (Schmitt, 1999). In transitioning from standard approach of offering functional benefits, consumers want their experiential benefits to impact how they feel, think, and behave (Schmitt, 1999). Joško Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang (2014) built on this idea by stating that people are more interested in things that are visually pleasing to them. In the context of this study, visually pleasing experiential benefits could come in the form of a facility tour or attending a closed-practice due to how they make student-donors feel and behave by knowing that they are receiving something that is not offered to everyone. The reasoning for this is that visually pleasing products result in increasing consumer's positive outlook and opinion towards receiving it (Joško Brakus, Schmitt, & Zhang, 2014). Another study presented an interesting approach to the positive effect offering experiences has, specifically within private brands, due to it serving as way to increase awareness and understanding amongst those who may not be familiar with the brand (Zhang, Li, & Yang, 2015). This idea could be useful information to know for fundraisers who are focused on offering experiences to their student-donors. Whether it is allowing student-donors to bring a plus-one guest with them or even simply creating an experience to show all prospective student-donors what becoming a member would be like, building that familiarity may be all it takes to get someone to join.

Another result from this study was in regards to the primary tangible item offered as a benefit, which specifically pertained to the concept of enhancing the public recognition of a student as a donor by offering them a membership t-shirt. The author concluded that one approach fundraising associates use for offering t-shirts as the main tangible benefit is in reference to giving students something they can keep in exchange for their donation, but also using it for personal gain. What is meant by this is that the t-shirt provides students with the "sense of belongingness" motive that was presented by Schervish and Havens (1997) when discussing the Social Identification Theory, but also helps to generate awareness for the student membership. Stinson and Howard (2010a) presented the effect that tangible benefits have on whether a decision to purchase is made by explaining how it meets a consumer's need for "consumption philanthropy" (p.748). Especially with cheaper-priced student memberships, students receive a t-shirt because it is a benefit that can be offered to make them feel like they purchased something. The idea is to offer a benefit that is consistent with the price that it costs to do something (Stinson & Howard, 2010a).

The third theme within this study was on the selecting the appropriate student-donor membership fee. Due to the topic of membership fees, in regards to charitable giving as a whole, being uniquely set-up within each separate organization there is no common approach to understand it. Within the results of this study, the answers fundraising associates provided were to offer a membership fee cheap enough so that students do not hesitate to join, which is consistent with the Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) study. Drayer and Rascher (2013) added to this belief by explaining how it is not an uncommon approach to avoid focusing on generating a profit, while instead being more concerned with increasing attendance. In connecting this to the student-donor membership, the attendance factor would relate to the membership focus being on increasing participation by offering a low enough price that students do not think twice about joining. There is also no denying the immediate effect price has on a how a consumer feels and behaves towards the deciding the value of something (Zeithaml, 1988), so athletic annual funds should offer a cheap membership fee to avoid the price barrier altogether. The other idea references having a long-term outlook on the matter by realizing that by offering a cheap price, the membership will grow and result in enhancing the level to which individuals identify with the membership. It is through this increase in identification that loyalty towards the membership will grow and therefore result in more money being received in the future (Drayer & Rascher, 2013). Standard athletic annual funds are typically structured to offer a range of donation levels, with each level providing a donor with different incentives depending on the one the select. The larger the donation level is that an individual chooses to joins, the more benefits they will receive in exchange for their contribution. Prior research on the concept of using membership levels as a form of “category reporting” has been shown to provide donors with the ability to use giving levels as status symbol (Cartwright & Patel, 2013). With the majority of existing student-donor memberships only offering one membership level, an error in developing how students view the correlation between giving and receiving has already occurred. Although it is not common practice, several student memberships throughout the NCAA do provide students with the ability to select from 2-3 different price levels that depend on the benefits they desire. While many fundraising associates stated that their single-level student membership fee serves are an extension of their annual fund, it is actually the funds structured as multi-level membership fees that are preparing students for the situation they will face once they transition into the annual fund.

With membership prices varying between annual contributions of $15-$200, several associates referenced the price point as a discount from the minimum annual fund donation. The benefit to using the discount approach gives students two main beliefs, with the first being that they believe they are saving money by joining now (Lange & Stocking, 2009). The second belief is that by offering the student membership as a “discount” to the annual fund, it will result in students seeing even just the minimum annual fund donation as an up-grade once they transition into it (Lange & Stocking, 2009). An additional idea to consider was found though the Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) study which illustrated how insensitive fundraising practices have led to women making smaller donations due to not receiving the same recognition for their contribution as men get. Although the Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) study was on analyzing gender roles in donating, associates would be wise to see students as “future” large donors so that they can avoid a similar situation from developing as a result of student-donors feeling unappreciated for their small donation.

One way to develop more sensitive fundraising practices can be done as a result of the fourth theme to this study: communicating within a student-donor membership. A previous research study conducted by Shapiro (2010), showed direct mail and telephone calls were both acceptable methods to use by standard annual fund donors. However, the study continued by explaining that technological advancements were allowing for more interactive relationships to be created (Shapiro, 2010), which is consistent with the findings from this study. The ability to communicate through multiple social media platforms allows for content to be produced in ways that cause audiences to interact with it differently, depending on which is used. It has been noted that the way that audiences consume information occurs through their online interactions with posts and other users (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016). Instagram, for instance, has been shown as a platform where advertisements are received more positively by users (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). Therefore, athletic annuals funds could use it to release membership recruitment and renewal material. However, an alternative to this would be using Twitter to post an athletic-related breaking-news story due to this platform serving the purpose of meeting users' needs for useful and timely updates (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). As a result of this study, fundraising associates explained that while sending emails does still work for reaching students, taking steps to avoid "email blasting" them with constant updates has been done through the additions of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Along with the technological methods for communicating with student donors, utilizing face-to-face communication is the initial approach fundraising associates prefer to use for recruiting new members. With having an in-person approach to recruitment occurring primarily at a university's summer freshmen orientations, this allows for peer-to-peer solicitation to be used in a situation where there is the largest number of potential new members all in one place. This in-person solicitation method is consistent with previous research found on the topic, which even goes as far as to reference it as the best method for successful solicitation (Grover, 2007). An additional way for both communicating with student-donors and recruiting new members to be done is by having a fundraising associate, or ideally a Student Board Committee, serve as liaisons to each student organization on campus. By having this method in place, providing proper training to each direct contact within these student organizations will ensure that the proper solicitation protocol is followed (Grover, 2007). In doing so, each direct contact is then fully prepared to educate potential student-donor members on what the membership is and benefits associated with joining.

The final theme that was found as a result to this study was on branding a student-donor membership. The two key sub-categories within this theme were centered on "student engagement" and positioning it as an "extension of the annual fund". Previous research has indicated that universities need to have a long-term approach to branding that is centered on the values and beliefs the organization as a whole has been built on (Whisman, 2009). In regards to the approach, Whisman (2009) was referencing that the idea is in relation to corporate branding versus having a short-term approach, otherwise known as product branding. Corporate branding, as it pertains to student-donor memberships, creates a layout of all the experiences a donor could have as member. This action is consistent with the "extension of the annual fund" sub-category due to it highlighting an individual's experiences as a student-donor, as well as those they would have after transitioning to the annual fund. Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) also stated that being able to generating strong brand awareness is the first step towards creating positive brand equity. In relating this to student-donor memberships, bringing attention to the positive experiences student-donors have by joining results in the athletic annual fund being the primary benefactor due to its association with the student membership. This familiarity aspect has been found to be a strong indicator for showing why a brand is being considered by an individual (Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998).

For the engagement sub-category of branding the student-donor membership, it too was consistent with the Whisman (2009) study, which spoke on the transition of an organization from offering one-way conversations to now having two-way discussions. It is in response to having these two-way conversations that fundraising associates and student-donors can work together to build a mutually satisfying relationship. In addition to this, fundraising associates also learn how to discover what specific factors associated with the student-donor membership students respond positively to and which ones need to be revised. Evidence of these factors can often times be found through the efforts a firm displays in their previous marketing programs that result in how consumers feel towards the brand as a whole (Keller, 1993). Applying the previous statement to this study, a long-term effect that fundraisers need to be aware of is that the marketing strategies they use within the student membership will affect how student-donors remember their experience. It is through student-donors recalling their student membership experience that they will then associate it with the athletic annual fund. The process of brand recall and recognition can also occur when a consumer sees something such as a logo or name, followed by the thoughts associated with what they know about it (Keller, 1993). An additional study by Jacoby and Syzbillo (1977) presented evidence that through a person having a familiarity with a brand; it provides them with a feeling of safety, regardless of whether they have had a personal experience with it. The previous finding can be applied to this study to ensure that branding strategies for student-donor memberships are focused on developing the familiarity of the brand to both members and non-members.

In regards to the engagement factor of student memberships, marketing an image of the student-donors being involved at college athletic events will result them developing a positive brand recall. This idea was also addressed by Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) who explained brand recall occurring as a result of the perceived offerings a consumer associates with the brand. In other words, brand image can be created through the process a consumer goes through as they work towards understanding the significance of the brand (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). With an emphasis being placed on the engagement aspect of student-donor members, the tangible and intangible benefits that students receive through their participation can impact the brand image that they create.

The results of this study provided the author with structure, benefits, membership fee, communication, and branding as the five key categories associated with student-donor memberships. In response to the findings, the author was also able to answer each of the three research questions. With the purpose of this study being on discovering the primary characteristics associated with offering student-donor memberships within collegiate athletics, it resulted in both key similarities and differences that can help build on what we already know about fundraising and donor memberships. The author was able to compare the results of this study to the previous research conducted on donor theories, motives, and memberships, which produced the findings that were discussed above. Within the following sections, the author has also presented the study's practical implications, limitations, and considerations for future research.

Practical Implications

The practical implications from this study were within the realm of philanthropy, applying primarily to fundraising practices, donor relations, and structuring donor memberships. Within this study, the approach used for understanding donor relations was done through the perspective of a fundraising associate. The purpose for using each perspective connects back to the peer-to-peer method for soliciting to donors (Grover, 2007), which can result in both parties being mutually satisfied (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). By beginning an individual's donor lifecycle while they are still in college, associates are now faced with the challenge of know the characteristics for an entirely new demographic of donors. Due to the financial restraints of students, the process fundraisers use for interacting with them must instead rely heavily on long-term goals rather than on what they can solicit from them now. With this study producing results that pertain to student-donor memberships, fundraising associates can confidently use this research as a framework for offering their own student membership, as well as how to build relationships with student-donors. Prior to conducting this study, the author set the secondary purpose for this thesis to be on producing the results necessary to create the "ideal" student-donor membership within collegiate athletics. An in-depth analysis was conducted by the author to show the overall findings that produced the study's desired results, all of which are detailed below.

Structure. When structuring the "ideal" student-donor membership the overall purpose should be on using it as a "pipeline" to the athletic annual fund. The benefit to getting students thinking about philanthropic giving while they are still at the university is for convenience and educational purposes. Building their understanding for the relationship that exists between donating and receiving benefits prepares them for post-graduation when they become interested in purchasing season tickets. It is important for these students to understand before they graduate that donating to a University's athletic annual fund is often the only way to purchase season tickets. With athletic annual funds offering a range of donation levels that are connected to different benefits, the two most popular are purchasing season tickets and selecting seat locations. Also, with the students still being at the university, it provides an easy opportunity to acquiring their information so that they are already in the donor system for future solicitations once they graduate. Due to student memberships pertaining to athletics, operating it within the athletic annual fund ensures that its goals and outcomes remain consistent with the fund as a whole. In addition to this, utilizing a Student Board Committee will strengthen the fundraising team by having students' perspectives on student-specific matters. Also, the main challenges and barriers that a fund needs to be aware of for implementing a student-donor membership include generating awareness, advancing the membership, showing its perceived value, and getting in-house buy-in. While each is a common challenge that a student membership may face, it is advised to address the issue of getting in-house buy-in first. Once a student membership has the support of the entire fund, the necessary steps can be taken to ensuring that it is structured properly to effectively serve as the first step of a donor's lifecycle.

Benefits. In terms of setting the membership up as transactional or transformational, students respond more positively towards the transactional approach. However, due to the emphasis on the annual fund being on the transformational benefits to donating, fundraising associates should still work to educate students on why their contribution matters. With that being said, in building on having a transactional approach, it is beyond crucial to emphasize the "exclusiveness" factor of the benefits that are offered within the student-donor membership. The reasoning behind this is due to, in some cases, there being too many separate "fan groups" that exist within some athletic departments, instead of having one student-donor membership to unite them all.

In the case of Michigan State Athletics they have a non-branded student section for football, as well as the “Izzone” for men’s basketball. In addition, they also have the “Munnsters” student section for their hockey team, the “Red Cedar Rowdies” for soccer, and “George’s Jungle” for volleyball. Although having five different “fan groups” is confusing enough, the main issue is that three of them require a separate membership fees. It costs $183 for the football student section, $55 for the “Izzone”, and an $85 fee to be a part of the “Munnsters” (Michigan State Spartan Athletics, 2019). However, to make this even more confusing, a separate t-shirt is provided through each paid memberships but for the “Izzone” the fee is set up in a way that only allows students to have the opportunity to purchase their home basketball tickets for an additional $10 per game. While the football student section membership fee only goes towards home game tickets, “Izzone” members are invited to attend a campout and other group activities/events through the basketball program, as well as having a shorter wait-time to enter the arena on game day. The only extra benefit for being a “Munnster” is that their t-shirt benefit comes in the form of a jersey and they also are invited to a pre-season event with the team.

Referencing back to the “Red Cedar Rowdies” and “George’s Jungle”, both of these student fan groups are free to all students and no additional benefits are provided. The drawback to having so many separate student fan groups stems both from students having a lower disposable income, meaning they may have to choose which they want to join the most, as well as the absence of offering them consistent “exclusive” benefits that align with their membership fee. If an athletic annual fund was to instead offer one student-donor membership that includes each sports student fan group, it will ensure that they are providing tangible and experiential benefits that showcase the exclusivity of the membership benefits students otherwise would not receive by not donating. In addition to this, having separate student fan groups is a missed opportunity for generating long-term revenue due to athletic annual funds failing to build a lasting relationship with these students who are demonstrating the proven donor motives of affiliation and socialization (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2014). As it currently stands with having separate fan groups, no education on philanthropic giving is occurring and students only receive membership benefits that are specific to the program they are supporting. With the athletic annual fund being non- college students way of supporting a university's athletic programs, beginning current students understanding that the student-donor membership also serves as their only way to have access is imperative. Listed below are just a few of the "ideal" benefits that an athletic annual fund has at its disposal by offering a single student-donor membership instead of allowing separate student fan groups to exist.

For selecting the "ideal" benefits, student-donor memberships should be built around offering exclusive experiences or priority access to home games/tickets. The first reason this approach should be followed is because these benefits do not cost the department anything. The second reason is that, in some cases, an experience can motivate the student through public recognition (Degasperi & Mainardes, 2017), therefore enhancing their association with the group (Schervish & Havens, 1997). In regards to the experiences that are offered, these benefits will vary across athletic departments depending on whether or not they have a facility tours or popular coach that student want access to. For those that may not have a high-profile coach or facility, offering access to closed practices, sideline passes at games, graduation photos on the football field or in the basketball arena, and exclusive watch-parties have also proven to be successful. However, even with the primary benefits being experience-related, the consensus among fundraising associates interviewed within this study was for providing students-donors with a membership t-shirt. As it has been previously discussed, having the tangible benefit of a t-shirt is a simple way to give students something to have in exchange for their money. In doing so, if the t-shirt has a unique design is can also help to generate awareness for the student membership and give students a way to identify with the group (Schervish & Havens, 1997).

By connecting these membership benefits and reflecting back on the reasoning for implementing a transactional approach for student-donor memberships, the idea for using this approach is to get as many current students active as possible before they graduate. It is through the transaction of offering student-donors exclusive benefits for their membership fee that current students avoid feeling like they are making a huge sacrifice to donate since the relationship is built primarily around an exchange taking place. With that being said, by also briefly educating them on the philanthropic impact their gift makes, it then prepares them for the transformational approach that fundraising associates utilize once they transition into a Recent Graduate membership. Bass (2014) examined recent graduates and the results justified using the transformational approach on recent grads due to their desire to show loyalty, progress the athletic department, and provide educational benefits to student-athletes. However, it is interesting to think that the results of this student-donor membership study show fundraising associates agreeing that current students are too young to understand their philanthropic impact, while Bass (2014) has shown those within five years post-graduation have already realized it. The significance of this information is that recent grads are developing their understanding for philanthropic giving long before reaching what we have deemed as the most profitable, middle-age and financially stable, donor demographic. Meer (2013) added to this by emphasizing the negative impact that student debt can have on an individual's decision to donate, which has specifically been shown to affect recent graduates. Although, due to the results of Bass' (2014) study, this connection between educating a donor on their transformational impact may actually not be limited to how financially stable they are. The major take-away from transitioning the approaches used on student-donor and Recent Graduate memberships is that benefits for student-donors should build on enhancing their loyalty and commitment due to those being motivational factors for them as recent graduates.

Membership Fee. The topic of selecting the "ideal" fee to charge for a student membership is the most controversial factor presented within this study. With the membership prices varying from $15-$200, the amount that received the most responses was $25. One approach to validating the membership fee to students can be done by calling it a "discount" from the minimum donation required to be an annual fund donor (Lange & Stocking, 2009). Also, by using the discount method, it can be beneficial towards getting students to view the student membership as savings opportunity (Lange & Stocking, 2009). While the topic of single verses multi-level memberships has already been discussed above (Cartwright & Patel, 2013), both of the options are advised to offer at least a $25 membership fee. Whether it's the only choice or the entry-level option for a multi-level approach, the $25 fee coincides with the t-shirt benefit, therefore allowing the exclusive experiences to serve as the true benefits members receive. For funds looking to create a multi-level membership, ensuring that you have benefits that justify there being multiple giving levels will ultimately decide whether or not this pricing option is successful. In regards to athletic departments that consistently reach bowl games and post-season tournaments, a fundraising associate interviewed within this study spoke on their current situation. The associate discussed how their first level receives a t-shirt, the second receive priority access to post-season football, and the third receives priority access for post-season basketball.

At the end of the day, funds should select a price cheap enough to eliminate hesitation (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990) from potential student-donors, while also renewing current members to keep them involved in the donor pipeline. Due to the focus of student memberships not being on generating revenue, the worst mistake an athletic annual fund can make is setting their price too high. In these situations where future profits serve as a long-term goal, setting a cheap price in the present builds loyalty and increases the level of identification an individual portrays (Drayer & Rascher, 2013).

Communication. The process for deciding on the “ideal” communication process of student-donor memberships combines both old and new approaches. With emails continuing to serve as successful method for distributing information to members, a shift towards utilizing additional technology platforms can be beneficial (Shapiro, 2010). Students still receive emails from their university and check-in on the classes they are enrolled in, so this outlet remains relevant. A new approach that should also be utilized includes the social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Due to each platform serving a different purpose, knowing where to publish content can make a major impact on how it is received. With Facebook being focused on the “relationship” aspect provided through customized messages, Twitter allows for quick updates, conveniently located news stories, and interacting with followers (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). Additional platforms that should be utilized include Instagram, where users can share creative photo and video messages, as well as Snapchat, which can be used to release instant-photo and video messages (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). Although with Facebook becoming more of an “adult” platform, research has shown that over 75% of 18-24 year olds use Snapchat, over 70% are on Instagram, and over 45% have Twitter (Smith & Anderson, 2018). With the 18-24 year old demographic being the age of college students, athletic annual funds now know what platforms to use. This will also help them make the right decision on where to post certain types of message to successfully reach their target audience for information regarding student-donor memberships. However, something to keep in mind is that while it is convenient to constantly release new updates on social media, it can result in overwhelming students to where they develop a negative association towards seeing your posts. Another key communication factor that funds must also pay more attention to is on how they will recruit new members. With the consensus being on fundraising associates attending all freshmen orientations each summer, the reasoning for this is due to them being able to connect with a significant amount of potential new donors through in-person solicitation (Grover, 2007).

Branding. The final area associated with creating the “ideal” student-donor membership is on how to effectively brand it. By create the image of it being a way for students to be more closely involved with the athletic department; a mutually satisfying relationship can be built (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Those students wanting to have the full college experience of being a part of game-day activities and supporting their university, they can live out this dream by becoming a student-donor member. The second way for branding the student membership is by aligning it directly as an “extension of the annual fund”. This can be done by having the student membership include a similar logo and message as the athletic annual fund to generate brand recognition by both current and non-members. One additional approach to branding the student membership can be done though a mobile app on member’s smartphones. This unique idea was explained by a fundraising associate as a way to have everything related to the student membership located in one convenient place. Membership applications, renewal deadlines, exclusive benefits, upcoming events, mobile ticketing, priority point ranking, and much more can all be accessed by student-donors through their personal donor account. It is through the process of students creating their donor account that fundraising departments gain access to their contact info, which then allows for a direct release of information to be made to its intended audience.

Limitations

With this being a qualitative study, the results that it produced were acquired through purposive sampling, which relied on the data having to be interpreted by the author. Due to a lack of existing research done on college athletic donor memberships, connecting the findings to relative themes that also exist within athletic annual funds proved difficult. While data saturation was achieved during the interview process, conducting additional interviews to include departments that have chosen to disband their student-donor membership would have been beneficial.

Conducting the interviews over the phone was yet another limitation to this study due to the sensitive topics of charitable donations and donor relations. The main benefits to having conducted in-person interviews for this study include being able to take into account participants body language, as well as creating a more personal and understanding atmosphere that would lead to better communication.

It is not uncommon for limitations to occur within these types of studies due to participants having the ability to decide whether or not to share additional information regarding a specific question. Within this particular study, the issue of selecting what information to share was once again limited due to the sensitivity of the donor membership phenomenon that exists within college athletic fundraising and development departments. This limitation is in reference to fundraising associates wanting to ensure that both their own, as well as the identities of their student-donors remain anonymous. In several cases, comments were made but then had to be removed by the author at the request of the individual participating in the interview. Ensuring the confidentiality of the participants interviewed resulted in limiting several findings due to the unique aspects that would have given the participants identity away.

An additional limitation to this study was that the time frame used for contacting college athletic fundraising departments aligned directly with their renewal deadlines, as well as the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament. A higher likelihood of getting more fundraising departments with student memberships to participate in this study could have occurred simply by waiting to interview them until late-spring or over the summer. Although there were numerous limitations with this study, there is also an array of future research can be done to advance this study.

Considerations for Future Research

This study added valuable insight into the front-end of the donor lifecycle as it can be used to further the previous research on athletic annual fund donors and their motives. Several of the findings within this study on student-donor memberships were in direct correlation with the theories of donor motivations which had only been previously applied to standard adult donors. With that being said, due to this study serving as the first of its kind to attempt to understand student-donors memberships, it is necessary for future research to be conducted on student-donor motives. From a fundraising perspective, two of the leading motives for making a donation to athletics are to purchase season tickets and better priority seating options (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Stinson & Howard, 2004). By athletic departments offering student section tickets at a cheaper price, it becomes even more important to investigate student donor motives due to the primary ticketing and seating benefits having already been eliminated. Further exploration into the specific student-donors motive of perceived value, as it pertains to their association with the student memberships, would also be beneficial. However, it should be noted that a researcher may face the limitation of find enough student-donor members that are willing to participate in an interview on their motives. Due to donor accounts being confidential information, gaining access through an athletic annual fund's database may be a challenge.

With the purpose of the student membership serving as a "pipeline" and "extension of the annual fund", future research should be done on transitioning student-donors into Young Alumni programs. In regards to Young Alumni programs, athletic annual funds offer a discounted membership to recent graduates that typically last their first three to five years. For those fundraising departments that offer student memberships, the Young Alumni program often serves as a bridge between the student members and their transition into the athletic annual fund. Expanding on the role that graduating college with debt has on affecting a recent graduate's willingness to donate and remain affiliated with the athletic annual fund should also be done. While not relevant to this particular study, numerous answers fundraising associates provided while interviewing showed signs of a concern for how to best to transition student-donors into the Young Alumni program. It is due to this transition concern that there is significant interest throughout the industry to justify future research being conducted on the Young Alumni programs.

While the idea of a donor lifecycle had already been previously researched by Tom and Elmer (1994), the lifecycle that was created only touched on 10, 20, 30, and 40 years post-graduation. In developing an approach to furthering this research, looking at the effects that beginning a donors lifecycle while they are still attending the university have on their future donations would be one idea. The limitation to this study would be a result of many student-donor memberships still being relatively new, which means there would be little-to-no data available for them to speak on. While there are only a few that meet this requirement, using a student-donor membership that has been offered for over a decade would be the ideal for this scenario. By using a membership with extensive years of data to discuss, it would provide the necessary insight into showing whether student-donors are a positive addition to the transition process that occurs within a donor lifecycle. In addition to this, the Tom and Elmer (1994) study also showed a decrease in donations occurring after 40 years post-graduation, so another benefit to this study would be on whether the total years a donor donates is extended by starting their donor lifecycle early.

The final area of future research that this study offers is on recruiting upperclassmen and transfer students to join a student-donor membership. While this includes several of the themes that have already been presented within this study, the primary focus should be on addressing the communication and branding aspects. For the students that choose not to join the student-donor membership as freshmen, fundraising associates are faced with the challenge of reaching them outside of their standard freshmen orientation approach. The older students become, the more likely it is that they develop certain game-day routines which can actually serve as a motivating factor for them to not become a student-donor member. In addition to this, simply by "upperclassmen" involving transfer students, this fact alone justifies the purpose for conducting research on the topic. Further investigation into this area could show the role that being a fan of an athletic program has on affecting a student's decision to transfer to the university. If students transfer out of support for an athletic team, then it would confirm that the social identification theory is present among student-donors as well. Due to this theory involving individuals living vicariously through the success of an athletic program (Stinson & Howard, 2004), implementing recruitment tactics geared towards transfer students could produce a new opportunity for fundraising associates to capitalize on.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1.) When was the membership program started?
    a. Why was it started?
    b. How has it evolved?
2.) How did you develop the benefits that would be offered within a student-donor membership?
    a. How do you decide between or balance the tangible items v. experiences
3.) How did you arrive at your price point?
4.) How do you communicate with student-donors?
    a. What platforms do you utilize?
5.) What is your approach/strategy for recruiting new members?
6.) Discuss how you developed the branding for the student-donor membership.
7.) When structuring a student-donor membership, what are the most important factors to consider?
    a. Who should oversee it? (internal, student organization, Alumni Association)
8.) What are the barriers or challenges associated with implementing a student-donor membership?
9.) Would you say your student-donor membership is more transactional (exchange) or transformational (relational)?
10.) What are you looking to achieve with the student-donor membership?
    a. What are your goals/outcomes?
    b. How are they measured?