

**A Study of Young Alumni Engagement and Donor Participation among Top  
Research Universities**

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# **A Study of Young Alumni Engagement and Donor Participation among Top Research Universities**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2021

This study examined characteristics, structure, communication, and donor behavior related to young alumni at top research institutions with a specific focus on young alumni donor behavior at institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs. The purpose of this study was for institutions to learn from peers and determine if a dedicated young alumni program would impact young alumni donation amounts and/or donor participation rates. The study provided understanding of what institutions are doing regarding young alumni engagement and fundraising.

A total of 36 institutions from the 2017 *Top American Research Universities*, as reported by the Center for Measuring University Performance (MUP), participated in this study. Through descriptive statistics, and using the McMillan and Chavis (1986) “sense of community” theory, this inquiry was guided by improvement science and a full plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle. The findings of this study show the strategic effort and planning is similar at institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs. The descriptive differences that do exist in the results are explored and are not statistically different. In addition, the findings show how the entire sample of top research institutions defines young alumni and communicates with the audience, irrespective of having a dedicated young alumni program or not. Last, a finding that emerged was the impact on young alumni donor behavior based on institutional identity as public or private.

Based on the results of this study, important implications are offered. One implication is the importance of having strategic energy dedicated to young alumni while understanding that simply having or not having a dedicated young alumni program does not statistically impact young

alumni donation amounts or participation rate. Another implication is the goal for institutions to include both student engagement and philanthropy programs as well as strategic initiatives intending to increase alumni donor participation rather than one or the other. This strategy would complement and add to the “alumni-in-training” idea—meaning that institutions dedicate engagement and philanthropic strategy during the student years as well as the young alumni years to enhance positive experiences and work to impact alumni giving in the future.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my child.

Zara Noel Webb,

may you understand that the word “ceiling” only represents a surface above your head; find or build your stairs and keep going; you have no limits. You will forever remain my greatest motivation.

I love you, Zara.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The landscape of higher education is rapidly changing—specifically with regard to the needs and expectations of philanthropy in higher education. Dollars from philanthropy, which once paid for the expenses to promote institutional superiority, are now required to cover basic operating costs (McMillen & Palmer, 2018). Traditional revenue sources are less predictable in large part because the value of higher education is being questioned by the public (Blumenstyk, 2015). Changes in student demographics, increasing tuition prices, and changes in political leadership are only a few of the many shifts impacting institutions' journey to securing financial stability. Questions regarding how to effectively solicit additional donors are being asked of advancement departments, knowing that many colleges and universities need to overcome financial difficulties due to the decline of government appropriations and the overall economic climate (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Giving about a quarter of all philanthropic donations, alumni are the largest group of contributors for institutions, but the actual number of alumni who contribute is steadily declining (Blumenstyk, 2015; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Historically, donations from alumni represented the single largest source of philanthropic support for institutions of higher education (Kaplan, 2010). Advancement offices are being placed under intense scrutiny to be strategic and on the forefront of industry-changing philanthropic initiatives (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). These points demonstrate the larger problem facing institutions of higher education today; institutions need to develop strategic initiatives to increase the habit of giving by alumni, especially those who have recently graduated.

For the purpose of this study, “giving” refers to a financial contribution or monetary donation to an institution. In 2017, the median age of a top 100 campaign donor was 67, compared to 1977 when the median age was 53. As individual donors age, there are younger donors who should follow them. Individuals who are 40 to 45 years of age are becoming harder for institutions to find given that the number of alumni contributing to their alma mater has declined by 30% during the past 20 years (McMillen & Palmer, 2018). Not only are alumni who are 40 to 45 years old not giving back to their alma maters, but on average, only 9.3% of young alumni contribute to their institution (Gresko, 2016).

A fundraising consulting agency, Ruffalo Noel Levitz, reports that more than two-thirds of institutions have seen the number of donors drop between 2007 and 2015 (McMillen & Palmer, 2018). Donor participation rates between 2002 and 2010 declined from 13.4% to 9.8% (CAE, 2011). Between 2007 and 2009, at the height of the Great Recession, charitable donations in total dropped an estimated 13.5% (Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2010).

In 2008, hiring was at an all-time low, three million jobs had been lost, and more than three million homes had received foreclosure notices (Kantor, 2012). It was no surprise that development offices at institutions of higher education saw ramifications. In order to compensate for the decline in alumni giving, research shows that institutions are relying largely on the wealthy, particularly the super-rich, to make larger gifts more often (McMillen & Palmer, 2018). This is sometimes referred to as the donors-down, dollars-up strategy. Unfortunately, between 2008 and 2009, institutions saw a decline in revenue from donors (14.4%), disturbing institutions that mainly received larger gifts from fewer donors and rejecting the donor-down, dollars-up strategy (Bent, 2012; CAE, 2012).

Albeit the tactic of targeting the super wealthy may have worked in the past, advancement offices might also consider how to cultivate philanthropic alumni among recent graduates because the number of degrees conferred is on the rise but the percentage of alumni giving is decreasing (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; NCES, 2018). Recent research into alumni giving has focused on different factors that increase the probability of an individual's willingness and ability to donate (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). This type of research and analysis will benefit institutions' development offices and relieve the pressure of relying solely on wealthy alumni to make up for the decline in the percentage of alumni giving. During and after hard economic times, institutions have been inclined to limit investments for lower-level gifts to focus investments at the top of the pyramid. For a short-term strategy this might work, but it is shortsighted when it comes to long-term impact (McClintock, 2009). It is in the best interest of an institution's long-term sustainability to engage young alumni and promote philanthropy within this growing population.

## **1.2 Definitions and Terms**

Below is a list of definitions that are important to be aware of throughout this study. The list also includes key terms to provide clarity.

*Advancement/Development Offices:* The department responsible for monetary philanthropic donations and fundraising at an institution.

*Alumni:* Individuals who have graduated with a degree from a higher education institution.

*Alumni-in-Training:* The philosophy that programs developed to engage individuals during their student years build positive student experiences and have a salutary impact on alumni giving in the future by instilling a sense of "family" among current students.

*Carnegie Classification:* Founded through a nonprofit organization, the Carnegie Classification classifies higher education institutions to create a measurement of comparison.

*Donor:* An individual who gives a financial or monetary contribution to a higher education institution.

*Donors-down, dollars-up:* A fundraising strategy that focuses on soliciting fewer individual donors and instead targets the super-rich to give more; hence, this results in fewer donors but more dollars from the donors who do give.

*Giving:* For the purpose of this study, “giving” is referred to as a financial contribution or monetary donation to an institution.

*GOLD:* An alumnus/a who is a Graduate of the Last Decade.

*Ivy-Plus Institutions:* Eight Ivy League Institutions and two commonly associated institutions including: Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, MIT, Princeton University, Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University.

*Participation Rate:* As indicated by the Council of Aid to Education (2011), participation is defined as the percentage of donors related to the overall number of records.

*Philanthropy:* An action to improve mankind without any motive to profit. Oftentimes this is a sacrifice of time and/or resources to positively influence the quality of life for others.

*Top Research Institutions:* The sample for this study includes top research institutions as reported by the Center for Measuring University Performance (MUP) in their 2017 annual report of the *Top American Research Universities*.

*Young Alumni:* Young alumni, as defined by the Education Advisory Board (EAB), are



individuals who graduated within the past 10 years. This young alumni definition includes two sub-segments: Youngest Alumni and Career Starters. Youngest Alumni include those who graduated within the past four years, and Career Starters are identified as those who graduated five to 10 years ago (Gresko, 2016). Even though the criteria for who is considered a young alumnus/a varies, a majority of institutions categorize them as individuals who graduated within the past 10 to 15 years and fall between the ages of 25 to 35 (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). This study refers to young alumni as individuals who have graduated in the past 10 years.

### **1.3 Background of Study**

#### **1.3.1 Current State of Philanthropy and Development Strategies in Higher Education**

Since World War II, advancement in American higher education has had three major trends, starting with the structure of the field. Institutions have operationalized internal development offices, with a chief advancement officer who reports directly to the president. Next was an increased focus on strategic fundraising, with initiatives that engage alumni (Van Horn, 2002). Last, many institutions utilized the donors-down, dollars-up approach (Drezner, 2011), which in recent years is changing again as institutions learn that this philosophy is not beneficial for long-term plans (Van Horn, 2002). By 1955, institutions had enough fundraising professionals to create the American Alumni Council to help fundraisers raise money from alumni, and the American College Public Relations Association, which focuses on building positive relationships with alumni (Van Horn, 2002).

Modern universities in America have been significantly impacted by the giving history of individuals and foundations (Hall, 1992). Charitable contributions in the U.S. to higher education was \$30.3 billion in 2011, representing a 4.8% increase from 2010 (CAE, 2012). These funds were secured from many sources such as foundations (28.6%), alumni (25.7%), non-alumni (18.6%), corporations (16.6%), other organizations (9.4%), and religious organizations (1%) (CAE, 2012). Philanthropy in higher education has become increasingly critical, with college presidents spending approximately 25 to 35% of their time on fundraising initiatives (Hurvitz, 2010).

As development efforts and structure continue to evolve, studies such as this one will allow for institutions to identify new fundraising strategies, including identifying new target audiences with an opportunity for growth.

### **1.3.2 Importance of Participation Rates**

One population that has a significant potential impact on higher education institutions today, for multiple reasons, is young alumni. First, the population is growing, with more degrees being conferred yearly; second, research shows that the sooner an alumnus/a becomes a recurring donor, the more gifts will accumulate over time (Flannery & Harris, 2010); and third, alumni who make gifts, of any size are likely to become major donors in the future when capacity for giving increases (Hurvitz, 2010; Lindahl & Winship, 1992; Meer, 2010; Monks, 2003). Young alumni, many of whom do not give charitable contributions to their institutions, are also negatively affecting participation rates (Target Analytics, 2011).

Not only is it important to identify how to increase young alumni donor participation for the financial gains, but it is also important for the institution's ranking. Reports such as *U.S. News & World Report*, MUP, and *Barron's* include donor participation rate as a variable in the university

ranking process (Van Horn, 2002). These publications have linked alumni giving and alumni satisfaction with the overall alumni educational experience (Van Horn, 2002). In understanding the connection between donor participation and university rankings, institutions have become committed to developing strategies to improve alumni participation rates (Target Analytics, 2011).

According to the Council of Aid to Education (2011), participation is defined as “the number of donors as a percentage of the number of individuals on record” (p. 10). Advancement offices take this definition and focus on enhancing participation rather than the dollar amount from donations and major gifts. Young alumni donor participation is low due in part to the misperception that their modest donation may not have an impact (Achieve & JGA, 2011; ESG, 2010; Wastyn, 2009) and because young alumni of public universities believe the need is not significant because the government supports their institutions (Leslie, 1988). The Mood of Alumni survey (2010) reports that a common reason why alumni do not make a gift is because the alumnus/a does “not think the school really needs the money” (ESG, 2010, p. 4). Given that studies show that alumni choose not to make a gift because they believe their small donation will not impact the institution, it is the job of advancement offices to educate donors on where the gift would go, whom it would help, and how it would help (ESG, 2010; Hurvitz, 2010; Sun et al., 2007, Wastyn, 2009).

### **1.3.3 Role of the Student Experience**

Before advancement offices even have the opportunity to educate donors on philanthropy, many institutions are focusing on developing a culture of giving among students. This “alumni-in-training” philosophy allows institutions to instill habits that will transition from student years to young alumni years (Pumerantz, 2005; Wampler, 2013). Student giving, and the culture of student

giving while on campus, are components to cultivating philanthropy in young alumni. Habits formed while students are on campus set the stage for future giving. It is a long-term game with students and young alumni (CASE, 2015). Setting a foundation and cultivating a relationship that will encourage gifts of any size, even a small gift, is important because it builds a relationship for when an alumnus/a's capacity to give increases. The habit of giving speaks to an alumnus/a's willingness to give. A young alumnus/a's willingness to give is justified with the expectation that it will lead to larger gifts in the future when capacity increases (Freeland, Spenner, & McCalmon, 2015; Monk 2003).

Alumni who describe their undergraduate experience as positive are more likely to give to their alma mater, making the student years so important (Freeland, 2015). The task for institutions is to understand what makes an alumnus/a describe their undergraduate experience as positive. Schervish and Haven (1997) indicate the specific importance of school extracurricular participation as a connection to a positive college experience. School organizations give students the opportunity to learn about the needs of the institution and develop attachment to the institution. The more a student is involved in student organizations and other affinities such as athletics, programs, and councils, the more likely a student is to have a positive experience (Freeland, 2015). Institutions need to be aware of the students who are most involved and attached as undergraduates because, once those students graduate, they become the alumni who will have the greatest willingness to give.

## 1.4 Problem of Practice

At the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt), we have a need to increase our young alumni engagement and donor participation. Pitt identifies young alumni as undergraduates who have graduated in the past 10 years. Age is not a restriction when considering young alumni. In fiscal year 2018, 2.8% of young alumni gave a gift to the university. This is significantly less than the industry average, mentioned earlier, of 9.3% of young alumni who contribute to their alma mater (Gresko, 2016).

Pitt has many challenges associated with young alumni satisfaction and increasing young alumni donor participation. Specifically, Pennsylvania ranks the lowest in spending per capita, and Pitt has undergraduate students graduating with a higher amount of student loan debt than the average undergraduate student graduating across the country (Marshall, 2019). Individuals with higher student debt are less likely to acknowledge satisfaction with an institution or become a donor (Freeland, 2015). Even with the reality of our situation, my role at Pitt is to strategically develop a strong engagement and philanthropy program administered and managed by the Division of Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement to increase affinity and connection to Pitt and ultimately donor participation among young alumni. As the director of Panthers Forward, a program dedicated to reducing student debt and increasing young alumni donor participation, my research will provide insight for growth and future restructuring.

The research for this study was done because Pitt needs to increase donor participation, and fundraising from alumni is critical to the success of the institution. The culture of giving to Pitt has a lot of room for improvement among students, as evidenced by lackluster performance for senior-class-giving campaigns and young alumni donor participation. This study seeks to inform the Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement leadership team about the strategies other top

research institutions are implementing to engage and connect with young alumni. Further, this study illustrates engagement and solicitation models for young alumni that have proven successful at peer and aspirational institutions.

## 1.5 Overview of Study

This study had two main purposes that were explored through three research questions. Primarily, the purpose of this study was to identify characteristics and departmental structure, as well as types of outreach and programming, as it relates to young alumni at top research institutions to ultimately support Pitt's growth of young alumni engagement. Another purpose was to understand young alumni donor behavior at top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program. The three research questions that guided this inquiry include: 1) how do top research institutions define young alumni, and what are the characteristics and departmental structures as it relates to young alumni engagement and development; 2) what types of outreach and programming are top research institutions using as it relates to young alumni; and 3) how do young alumni donor participation rates and amounts differ among top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program? In order to answer these research questions, a survey was electronically administered to top research universities as reported by MUP in its annual report of the *Top American Research Universities*.

Improvement science and a plan-do-study-act model (PDSA) guided this inquiry. PDSA provided a framework that allowed for action-oriented learning and implementing changes leading to improvement (ACT, n.d.). I engaged with an entire PDSA cycle for this study. The "plan" was to improve young alumni donor participation. Relating to the "do," I used quantitative research by

developing a survey instrument and collecting data. The “study” was analyzing the findings and determining recommendations that could be adopted. Finally, the “act” was putting the findings and recommendations into practice at Pitt.

Findings were analyzed and shared through descriptive statistics. Two-Way ANOVA tests compared critical data points to report if the difference was impactful. This study has the opportunity for colleges and universities to learn about peer institutions and provide significant long-term benefits to strategic philanthropic planning.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

In order to capitalize on the opportunity that exists for young alumni engagement and giving, a critical review of literature was necessary. Until recently, only a limited amount of scholarly work was available on the connection between young alumni engagement and giving (Wampler, 2013). The three sections below are centered around findings from literature relevant for this study. The three sections include influencing young alumni engagement and giving, young alumni communication and outreach, and current programs.

### **2.1 Influencing Young Alumni Engagement and Giving**

Institutional characteristics such as prestige, strength of academic programs, size of the university's endowment, success of athletic teams, and national rankings have been known to influence alumni engagement and giving (Baade & Sunberg, 1993; Brittingham & Pezzulo, 1990; Duronio & Loessin, 1990; Leslie, 1988). The challenge for advancement offices is identifying how to enhance the pride and prestige as part of a comprehensive strategy to engage and motivate young alumni.

#### **2.1.1 Engaging Young Alumni**

Young alumni are more likely to create a deeper connection to their institution than older alumni (ESG, 2010). This connection is a foundational factor in the giving process (Mann, 2007).



One effective strategy to create this relationship is to connect current students and young alumni (McDearmon, 2010; Monks, 2003; Wingerter & Harris, 2007). MIT and Lafayette College have both introduced initiatives addressing this idea.

Even before becoming accepted to MIT, prospective students are connected with MIT alumni. MIT's admission website contains stories, blogs, and images of alumni showcasing their continued connection to the institution. Additionally, the acceptance letter for MIT is not a simple piece of paper but rather a packet of information including videos from recognizable alumni, a certificate that can be framed, and personalized communication developed with the individual student's interests in mind (MIT, n.d.; Wampler, 2013). Young alumni have the ability to share a more immediate past student experience and how it served them well right out of college (Fusch, 2010d). When young alumni share their story with prospective and accepted students, it is beneficial for the admission office because students can see where they are going, and of value for the alumni relations and development office because it reminds young alumni of the positive experiences they had when students. In an effort to develop a more solid bond between students and alumni, Lafayette College ends all of their prospective student tours in the alumni office. The alumni office gives aspiring students an idea of the services and resources that will be available to them as alumni (Wampler, 2013).

Research supports that institutions of higher education that dedicate significant budgets for alumni relations, student education, and outreach programs will have more long-term effective and successful young alumni development programs (Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson, 1995). Alumni involvement positively affects alumni giving behavior (Lindhal & Winship, 1992). One indicator of alumni involvement is alumni event participation (Wunnava & Lauze, 2000). A study from Gallo and Hubschman, (2003) analyzed alumni attendance in relation to financial contributions.

The findings indicated that alumni who participate in programs have a higher opinion of the institution and those who contribute have an elevated opinion of the institution. Ultimately, the study showed that the success of development offices is connected to building good relationships with alumni and keeping them engaged and satisfied with the institution's direction (Gallo & Hubschman, 2003).

### **2.1.2 Motivating Young Alumni to Give**

Alumni perceptions and relationships are important because higher education institutions rely on alumni donations and support for essential resources and volunteer leadership (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002). To increase alumni contributions, advancement departments have worked to examine the factors that motivate alumni giving. The Millennial Donors report (2011) finds that millennial donors have blended the need for technology with the time-honored desire for trust. Ninety percent of respondents stated they would no longer give to an organization if they could not trust the organization (Achieve & Johnson, 2011). Trust is only one aspect of understanding a young alumnus/a's motivation to give.

Motivation to give, as it relates to higher education institutions, is described by Meer (2013) as unobserved heterogeneity—for example, an alumnus/a's affinity to one's school. Other motivators described by Meer (2013) include the amount of student loan debt being addressed by the graduate after graduation, postgraduation education, demographic factors, as well as athletic involvement and exogenous experiences such as a team's winning and success. For the purpose of this study, the term "motivation" is interchangeable with "willingness." The goal of understanding an alumnus/a's motivation to give back includes understanding that person's affinity to their institution. Jerold Pearson (1999) indicates:

Alumni who are most satisfied with their student experience are the most likely to remain engaged with the university as alumni, and as engaged alumni are more likely to read university communications. Simply put, the stronger the relationship, the more likely they are to be donors (p. 7).

Supporting this idea, other scholars theorize about the relationship between a donor's willingness to give and certain characteristics, including satisfaction with their college experience and developing a brand connection to the school (Clotfelter, 2003; Monks, 2003; Mount, 1996; Schervish & Havens, 1997; Sun, Hoffman & Grady, 2007). Freeland (2015) has a deeper explanation of this theory by recognizing three broad factors that play a role in an alumnus/a's motivation to give. The three broad categories include sociodemographic characteristics, financial support, and college experience (Freeland, 2015).

Sociodemographic characteristics include typical predictors such as income and wealth, but also expand to gender, race, and ethnicity. Studies by Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995) as well as Eckel and Grossman (1998) show women are more generous; however, because men have higher earning potential, they are more able to give (Okunade, 1996). Other studies saw no gender difference when soliciting donations other than income (Clotfelter, 2003; Cunningham & Cochifano, 2002; Marr et al., 2005). Monk's (2003) research reports that people of color give less in amount than whites, which could be attributed to the annual salary gap between whites and people of color. Although white people give a higher amount the giving in proportion to income is higher for people of color (Gasman & Sedgwick, 2005). Additionally, non-formal philanthropy among black communities, such as percentage of income going to church, community organizations, and family members, is widespread and hard to track because they fall outside institutions structure of tracking and reporting (Gasman & Sedgwick, 2005).

The second broad category discussed by Freeland (2015) that plays a role in alumni motivation to give is whether the alumnus/a received financial support. Financial support including scholarships, grants, and loans are necessary for many students due to the rising costs of tuition. The research finds that alumni who received scholarships were more motivated to give; evidence that receiving loans impacted an alumnus/a's willingness to give is less consistent (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002; Marr et al., 2005). Knowing this, it is important for institutions of higher education to be aware of alumni who received scholarships during philanthropic conversations between development officers and alumni.

College experience or student experience is the third category discussed by Freeland (2015) that affects alumni motivation to give. As mentioned in chapter one, the role of the student experience is significant. It is never too early to think about how an institution can shape the transition of student to alumnus/a (Wampler, 2015).

### **2.1.3 Student Experience**

Programs and initiatives are needed that focus on creating a positive student experience and educating students on the financial needs of a university (Hurvitz, 2010). In order for this to happen, institutional leadership needs to see the value of these programs and initiatives. Administrators need to be aware that longer-term investments in development, alumni relations, and integrating an "alumni-in-training" philosophy will have a positive return on investment for the university (Pumerantz, 2005). The students of today are the alumni and, one hopes, donors of tomorrow.

If students identify willingness to give before graduating, they are more likely to give as young alumni. Gift size for students and young alumni is less relevant; participation is critical.

Turner, Merserve, and Bowen (2001) agree that early and consistent participation is an indicator for patterns of giving later in life.

An expert on senior-class-giving programs from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education describes class-giving programs as intending to build patterns of behavior, not raise money (Ensign, 2010; Meer, 2014). In order to address the need to develop a habit of giving among students, institutions are creating strategies to increase student participation through senior class gifts. There are two unique factors that do not typically exist in alumni solicitation that help make student philanthropy and senior-gift initiatives successful. First, senior gifts typically have a fixed amount associated with “the ask.” This anchored amount signals to a senior how much to give. Donations tend to increase or decrease based on the knowledge of what others are estimated to give (Reinstein & Riener, 2012; Smith, 2012). Second, experts, including Meer (2011) as well as Meer and Rosen (2011), note that personal solicitations through the voice of peers increase rates of donations and amounts of contributions. While on campus, peer-to-peer solicitation is organic. Peers have a natural relationship and connections due to similarities in age and institution. The expectation for small gifts would be that they lead to larger gifts in the future (Meer, 2014). Creating the habit of giving stems from the ability to create relationships, which starts in the student years.

## **2.2 Aspects of Young Alumni Communication and Outreach**

When communicating and reaching out to young alumni, it is important to have a balance of technology and personal contact (Bent, 2012). Key characteristics and traits influence young alumni preferences in receiving communication from their alma mater, including technological

savvy, the need to be part of social change, team-oriented messaging, and the desire to feel special (Howe & Strauss, 2000). A variety of technological channels such as text messaging, social media, and others are channels used to communicate with young alumni. However, the adoption rate of texting is relatively limited for many schools (Howe & Straus, 2000). Although including a multi-channel approach to communicate with young alumni is important, substantial personal contact and messages are also necessary. Segmenting the young alumni audience is one way to address alumni preferences.

### **2.2.1 Segmenting Alumni**

Segmenting takes a particular population of individuals with or without similar characteristics and organizes the population based on variables within that audience. The presence of certain variables may require the need to customize the message for each segmented audience (Afolayan, 2012). Afolayan (2012) identifies communication and solicitation preferences by examining the association between age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, and educational and income levels. Designed to provide empirical data for alumni communication and solicitation preferences, Afolayan's research is important, as it is adapted and restructured to ask questions of institutions in the methodology for this study.

Afolayan found a significant association between age and preferred solicitation method and communication method. Older alumni had a stronger preference for U.S. mail than alumni who were young in age (Afolayan, 2012). Additionally, the findings of her research saw a connection between the student experience, alumni involvement, and giving (Afolayan, 2012). These findings are confirmed by the Engagement Strategies Group (2010), which indicates schools

that customize engagement and outreach strategies based on age and generation “hold a key to life-long connection.”

Another variable to consider is young alumni who have multiple degrees from the same institution. More and more, the traditional undergraduate student is entering straight into a graduate program upon graduation. Thus, it is becoming more common to have young alumni who have graduated in the past 10 years with multiple degrees. If a young alumnus/a has graduated twice from the same institution, the affinity is higher and that person should be spoken to in a way that highlights the dual degree (Afolayan, 2012).

In addition to properly segmenting young alumni to relate to their highest affinity, it is also important to take into consideration generational communication and the preferred channels of communication when working with young alumni. By understanding generational characteristics and communication preferences, institutions will be able to design a stronger and more effective strategy to cultivate young alumni donors (Achieve & JGS, 2001; Bent, 2012; Hart, 2011; McClintock, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Generational Communication**

Generation Z (or “Gen Z”) refers to the generation of people born after Millennials and also referred to as Post-Millennials, Homeland Generation, and iGeneration (Patel, 2018). Members of this generation were born in the mid- to late-1990s and are currently in college or just graduating college. Gen Z got their smartphones at an earlier age than their older counterpart (Millennials). Teens today got their first smartphone at the average age of 12, whereas individuals who are 18 to 24 got their first smartphone at the average age of 16, and individuals who are 25 to 34 got their first smartphone at the average age of 20. The world is trending in a mobile direction,

and solicitations need to be made and processed through a mobile-friendly platform. When reviewing information, Millennials' average attention span is 12 seconds and Gen Z's average attention span is eight seconds. Gen Z is the first generation to have smartphone devices throughout their entire teenage years. Millennials typically manage three screens at the same time, while Gen Z manages five screens at the same time (Patel, 2018). Additionally, 60% of Gen Z wants to positively change the future of our world and 25% are already involved in volunteer work (Patel, 2018). Overall, to develop the habit of giving with students and young alumni, institutions need to be smartphone-friendly and develop less than 12 seconds of information to digest for Millennials and less than 8 seconds of information for Gen Z.

Generational communication also impacts the need for current technology. Young donors are tech-savvy and need mobile-friendly solicitations and an overall mobile-friendly donor experience. Currently, 27% of Millennials make multiple online purchases a week from their smartphones and spend most of their online time on their smartphones (MobileCause, 2018). Industry experts have reported that 98% of text messages are read and 90% of those read text messages are read within the first three minutes. Ninety-one percent of all U.S. citizens have their mobile device within reach 24/7 (Morgan Stanley, 2011). Seventy-five percent of Millennials would rather give up the ability to talk and email on their smartphones than the ability to text (MobileCause, 2018). These statistics speak to the importance of current and mobile-friendly channels to connect, build relationships with, and ultimately solicit young donors.



## **2.3 Current Programs**

### **2.3.1 Student Programs**

Of almost 200 advancement and alumni relations offices surveyed in 2009, less than half reported having a student philanthropy program. At the institutions that indicated having a student philanthropy program, 43% had developed the program within the past three years (Ezarik, 2010). Creating awareness by conveying a “sense of shared purpose,” developing gratitude by building ceremonies and high-profile events where students can communicate their feelings back to the university, and cultivating giving by asking students to give and educating them on why they are giving are three necessary principles for any effective student philanthropy and engagement model (Wampler, 2013). Even without a dedicated program, a majority of institutions have some kind of “senior gift” effort. The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) regularly obtains more than 65% participation from graduating seniors in their senior-gift effort; it is in large part because more than 90% of the senior class attends celebratory events and programs hosted by the alumni relations office throughout their senior year (Wampler, 2013).

Beyond a dedicated student philanthropy program, a student alumni association is another positive way to educate students and promote young alumni involvement. Student alumni associations provide a connection between alumni relations staff and students as well as provide opportunities to engage. Gaier (2001) reports that 83% of universities with student alumni associations have created these associations with the intention of elevating young alumni involvement after graduation. Cultivating young alumni begins prior to graduation (Johnson & Eckel, 1988).

### **2.3.2 Young Alumni Programs**

Many institutions are starting to be more strategic in educating students about what is waiting after graduation, in their alumni years (Wampler, 2013). The Ivy-Plus institutions are a specific sample researched by Fredrick Wampler (2013). His qualitative study looks into which institutions are building programs designed to engage young alumni and why institutions with existing programs have achieved success in building relationships with their young alumni. Wampler's (2013) assumption is that institutions will be better off if an early connection is built with young alumni. For that reason, the research focuses on why and how universities build connections by exploring actual examples of programs developed for that purpose.

Of the 10 Ivy-Plus institutions, seven have dedicated young alumni programs. A majority of the institutions also have a minimum of one employee who is dedicated young alumni staff. The budget for young alumni programs at institutions with dedicated young alumni programs varies, but the majority have an annual budget of more than \$100,000. The number of sponsored young alumni events ranges from as few as two to three to as many as 25 to 30 per academic year.

This research is important because, in addition to Afolayan's (2012) study on communication and solicitation preferences, Wampler's (2013) survey was adapted to support this research. Going beyond the Ivy-Plus institutions, this study will identify characteristics from top research institutions to support strategic planning related to young alumni giving.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

The McMillan and Chavis (1986) “sense of community” theory is applied as the framework for this study to identify and explore strategies used to engage young alumni and cultivate young donors. The four components of the theory include 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. These four areas support how institutions think through philanthropic processes. The “sense of community” framework is defined as creating a feeling that members have belonging, as well as members feeling that they matter to one another in addition to the group, and a shared belief that will be accomplished by committing to being together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The four components of this theoretical framework can be utilized by institutions and relate to the wants and needs of young alumni to increase engagement and donor participation.

Membership as it relates to the “sense of community” theory indicates a feeling of belonging or personal relatedness. Five attributes are described on the part of members; boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system. Three of the five attributes attached to the membership component of this theory are applicable to specifically increasing young alumni engagement and giving. A sense of belonging and identification speaks to the belief and expectation of fitting into the group and willingness to sacrifice for the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This relates to young alumni who are connected to their institution and willing to make a gift. Personal investment has two components: 1) providing the feeling that a member has earned their place within the group and 2) the investment will be meaningful and valuable (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Both components of personal investment apply to young alumni engagement and giving because the theory instills purpose and meaning for individuals. The last area of membership that supports young alumni

engagement and donor participation at institutions of higher education is having a common symbol system. In higher education, this speaks to the language, landmarks, events, and big moments.

Influence in this framework for institutions of higher education correlates because members or alumni feel they are influential (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The sense of having some input or power is important to young alumni. Being able to influence the communication and programs allows for greater alumni involvement and commitment to being connected. McMillan and Chavis (1986) refer to the more commonly known term “reinforcement” as integration and fulfillment of needs. Competence, success of the community, and fulfillment of need are the three aspects of reinforcement they describe (1986). These three aspects of reinforcement are the foundation of behavioral research as well as important for a group to sustain a sense of togetherness (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The final component of the “sense of community” theory is the shared emotional connection. Two of the seven factors in shared emotional connection are most closely tied to increasing young alumni giving. The two factors are quality of interactions and investment. This means the institution’s ability to positively impact the student and alumni experience, and the feelings related to the educational investment increase the likelihood of young alumni donor participation. Ultimately, all of the components are applicable to what institutions can be doing to support young alumni engagement and young alumni donor participation.

### 3.0 Methodology

This quantitative study informed and enlightened Pitt in its approach to increase young alumni donor participation. The study identified characteristics and departmental structures as well as types of outreach and programming related to young alumni engagement and donor participation at top research institutions. It compared young alumni donor behavior at top research institutions that have dedicated young alumni programs with such behavior at institutions that do not have these programs. The study posed three research questions to guide its inquiry:

- 1) How do top research institutions define young alumni, and what are the characteristics and departmental structures as they relate to young alumni engagement and development?
- 2) What types of outreach and programming are top research institutions using to engage with young alumni?
- 3) How do young alumni donor participation rates and the amounts they contribute differ between top research institutions that have dedicated young alumni programs and those that do not?

The first question focused on the following aspects of participating institutions: definitions of “young alumni,” organizational charts, budgets, branding, metrics of success, challenges, and staffing. The types of outreach and programming asked about in the second question concentrated on communication content, channels of communication, and frequency of communications, as well as event or program frequency. The final question compared young alumni donor behavior related to how much young alumni give to their schools and donor participation rates at top research institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs.

### **3.1 Inquiry Approach**

This inquiry was guided by improvement science and a full PDSA model. The research conducted is foundational to improving young alumni engagement and young alumni donor participation at Pitt. Through one large PDSA cycle, evidence has been interpreted to provide ongoing improvements and add to future PDSA cycles (O'Connor & Speroff, 2004). The “plan” was to improve young alumni donor participation. The “do” was to use quantitative research, collecting data via a survey instrument as necessary because of the large sample size and information needs (Harris, 2014). The “study” analyzed survey data and findings to determine recommendations. Quantitative research allowed for a large number of responses to be systemically measured and precisely assessed (Nardi, 2018). Finally, the “act” component of this study was to put the findings and recommendations into practice at Pitt.

Given the goals of the study, scope of sample, research questions to be answered, and information needed, survey methodology offered the best possibility for meaningful, quality findings. It was not realistic or useful to conduct one-on-one interviews with more than 100 institutions across the country or to host focus groups to gather the necessary information. A survey was ideal because it provided quantifiable data that could be analyzed to identify characteristics and determine concepts. All survey responses were made anonymous for analysis and reporting.

Prior to exploring the survey design, it is important to note that the “planning” and “doing” phases of this PDSA incorporated literature from chapter two, conversations with senior leadership at Pitt, my professional experiences, and existing survey instruments.

### 3.2 Survey Design

The design of the survey included descriptive questions and provided responses to questions about relationships between variables. All three of my research questions were classified as either “descriptive questions” or focused on the “relationship between variables” (Nardi, 2018). Understanding characteristics and departmental structures as well as the types of outreach and programming for young alumni at institutions were descriptive questions, while looking into young alumni donor behaviors at institutions that have or do not have dedicated young alumni programs explored the relationship between two variables (those with such programming versus those without such programming).

Survey questions were created through the support of a comprehensive literature review, conversations with senior leadership at Pitt, my professional experiences, as well as adapting survey questions from Fredrick Wampler’s 2013 *Bridges to a Lifelong Connection: A Study of Ivy Plus Young Alumni Programs Designed to Transition Recent Graduates into Engaged Alumni* and LaTanya Afolayan’s 2012 *Alumni Giving: An Examination of Communication and Solicitation Preferences at a Public University in North Carolina*. Permission to borrow survey ideas was gained from Wampler and Afolayan prior to administering the survey. Both Wampler and Afolayan are established professionals in higher education who provide a wealth of career experiences in the field of alumni engagement. This study used Wampler’s survey as the foundation for questions seeking information about young alumni programs. The survey adapted his instrument to structure questions for this research to attain information about the various definitions of “young alumni” and to understand institutional characteristics and departmental structures. Appendix II provides a complete list of the questions asked in my survey that were formed for this research from Wampler.

Afolayan's survey was the basis of this study's survey questions about young alumni communications and solicitations. It is important to note that Afolayan's research sample is individual alumni while all survey questions for this study were asked of university administrators (not alumni). Appendix III shows the exact questions from Afolayan's survey that were modified for this research.

The complete survey instrument used to address my three research questions can be found in Appendix IV. The survey consisted of four sections, including demographic questions, structural information, outreach questions, and donor behavior metrics. Though respondents were required to anonymously answer all questions in order to complete the survey, closed-ended questions were developed in order to provide an efficient and time-sensitive survey. Additionally, to stay true to the quantitative nature of the survey design, closed-ended questions were most appropriate.

Specific details—such as institution size, student debt, and graduating student salary—constituted the demographic information asked in question three to give descriptive statistics on the responding sample. This descriptive demographic information is shared in the sample section of this chapter. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education classifies institution sizes according to four levels: very small (fewer than 1,000 degree-seeking students), small (1,000-2,999 degree-seeking students), medium (3,000-9,999 degree-seeking students), and large (at least 10,000 degree-seeking students). The levels set by the Carnegie Classification were the rationale for the selection options provided to top research institutions in the survey instrument. In 2017, the average college senior's student debt was \$28,650, as reported by the Institute for College Access & Success. Knowing that student debt has an impact on student's satisfaction with an institution and spending habits after graduation, the average student loan debt of graduating students for this sample was collected. Additionally, the survey asked about average post-



graduation salary as an additional piece of demographic information to support analysis of survey findings.

Institutions typically define young alumni in one of three ways: time since graduation (years beyond degree achievement), age (under a specific age), or both (ESG, 2010; Gresko, 2016; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). These three options are considered in survey questions inquiring about how institutions define “young alumni.” Last, if a respondent indicated having a dedicated young alumni program, the structural questions focused on the program’s structural information, whereas if the respondent did not have a dedicated young alumni program, the questions focused on institutional structural questions. In a reminder email sent to institutions that were invited to complete the survey on April 14, 2020, it was announced to those who had not yet completed the survey that a young alumni program for the purpose of this study is defined as an initiative that brings together a dedicated group of young alumni, as defined by an institution, to achieve a set mission, goal, and/or purpose.

Questions concerning the structure of existing programs at a participating institution focused on day-to-day operations, number of staff members responsible for young alumni outreach, and their plans to connect with young alumni.

The survey concluded with questions about donor behavior at institutions with dedicated young alumni programs versus those without dedicated young alumni programs. Table 1 shows the relationship among areas, research questions, and survey items.

**Table 1 Areas, Research Questions, and Items on Survey**

Area Name	Research Question	Item on Survey (Appendix IV)
Young Alumni Characteristics and Departmental Structure	How do top research institutions define young alumni, and what are the characteristics and departmental structure as it relates to young alumni engagement and development?	See questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
Types of Young Alumni Outreach and Programming	What types of outreach and programming are top research institutions using as it relates to young alumni?	See questions 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
Young Alumni Donor Behavior	How do young alumni annual giving participation rates differ between top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program?	See questions 5, 29, 30, 31, 32

### **3.3 Data Sample and Collection**

#### **3.3.1 Sample**

The sample for this inquiry came from MUP and its 2017 *Annual Report of Top American Research Universities*. Unlike other publications, MUP does not change its methodology annually. Rather than attempting to develop areas that influence the direction of universities and the public's perception of them, MUP examines nine measurements that have an impact on institution's performances. Those measurements are total research, federal research, endowment assets, annual

giving, national academy members, faculty awards, doctorates granted, postdoctoral appointees, and SAT scores (Lombardi, Abbey, & Craig, 2017). The *Top American Research Universities* report is particularly important to institutions' development offices because annual giving is one of the nine measurements. MUP looks at annual giving as the percentage of alumni who give to their institution, indicating levels of student satisfaction and postgraduation engagement among alumni. From an annual giving and development perspective, the fact that the sample institutions were on the same list as Pitt helped us understand the characteristics of young alumni to support future enhancements of young alumni engagement and donor participation at the institution.

MUP believes that in order to improve the quality and productivity of research institutions, faculty, students, and staff must embody a combined number of indicators to give a reasonable approximation of accomplishments relative to the finest universities in the country (Lombardi, Abbey, & Craig, 2017). Although many indicators serve this purpose, higher education observers believe that research is a predominant indicator when it comes to defining a top institution. MUP includes both total research and development expenditures as well as the extremely competitive federally sponsored expenditures in its nine indicators. Similarly, the number of faculty who are members of the national academies and the number of significant faculty awards earned constitute the faculty indicators. Students provided insight into two indicators in reflecting the quality of the institution and their credentials.

Institutions that rank in the top 25 on at least one of the nine indicators and also have more than \$40 million in annual federal research expenditures are defined as top research universities. MUP relies on insight from its advisory board and draws on support and recommendations from many colleagues willing to contribute data, information, and perspectives throughout the country

to provide a reliable and useful report to the academic community (Lombardi, Abbey, & Craig, 2017).

Thanks to the standards of practice, dedication to quality of research, and broad set of indicators that relate closely to existing literature, this report represented an ideal diverse sample of private and public institutions. Understanding the programs associated with young alumni engagement and donor participation among top research institutions allowed for growth and much-needed understanding of methods by which to increase young alumni giving at Pitt.

The *2017 Annual Report of Top Research Universities* provides information on the top American research institutions in three different ways: ranking the top 50 public and private institutions based on at least one of the nine indicators, ranking private universities only, and ranking public universities only. Given that Pitt is part of the combined list and the public-only list, my research sample included all 50 institutions in the combined public and private list as well as the 50 universities in the public-only list. This sample allowed Pitt to learn from a broad group of institutions and determine mechanisms that could work for it. A complete list of institutions that received my survey is included in Appendix I. For the purpose of this study, the ranking within the list of top American universities is irrelevant so the list of institutions is presented alphabetically.

A total of 36 institutions completed the survey. Demographics collected in the survey show a diverse dataset. Of the respondents, 64% called themselves public, 78% had young alumni programs, and 78% had at least 10,000 degree-seeking undergraduate students. Thirty-three of the responding institutions provided the average amount of student debt for a graduating undergraduate student and the average salary for postgraduation undergraduate students. Of those respondents, a majority (52%) stated the average student debt of a graduating undergraduate was

\$25,000-\$49,999, 45% indicated \$10,000-\$24,999, and 3% indicated less than \$3,000. A majority (64%) of institutions reported the average salary for a postgraduation undergraduate was \$50,000-\$74,999, 27% indicated \$25,000-\$49,999, and 9% indicated \$75,000-\$99,999.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection**

After careful development, the cross-sectional online survey was administered through a Qualtrics link sent via email to the highest level of leadership overseeing alumni engagement and institutional advancement at top American research institutions. Given that the researcher contacted the individuals directly, the population was single-stage (Creswell, 2018). The researcher identified the chief advancement officer at each of the institutions and identified their contact information by visiting the institution's website.

Once all contact information was collected, Kristin (Kris) Davitt, Senior Vice Chancellor for the Division of Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement at Pitt, sent an email to each contact on behalf of the researcher, as peer-to-peer outreach would likely allow for an increased rate of response. Appendix V includes a copy of that email. Surveys were available for response at one point in time only, from March 31 to May 20, 2020. An email reminder from the researcher was sent on April 14, 2020 and April 27, 2020. Survey responses were originally due by April 28, 2020; however, as the survey requested information from multiple departments within an institution, and in the interest of increasing the response rate, the deadline was extended.

Following the initial invitation to participate in this study, I was asked about the survey question addressing the definition of "dedicated young alumni program." All communication after the initial request to participate describes a dedicated young alumni program as "an initiative that brings together a dedicated group of young alumni, as defined by your institution, to achieve a set

mission, goal, and/or purpose.” Of the 36 responding institutions, 28 report having a dedicated young alumni program and eight report not having one.

### 3.4 Analysis

All data was cleaned to represent numerical values. Data was collected via Qualtrics, and Microsoft Excel was used to capture individual responses. For analysis purposes, the data was filtered and reviewed in groups related to structural patterns, outreach and programming, and young alumni donor behavior in conjunction with demographics, relationships, comparisons, and associations.

Question two in the survey asked for the responding institution’s contact information should a request for a follow-up interview or need to contact the institution arise. This contact information was also used to distribute an executive summary of the findings to responding institutions. Question three provided the research with the demographics of the responding sample. Specifically, the researcher indicated the percentage of institutions that responded who are public or private, as well as described the size of responding institutions and the amount of debt for graduating undergraduates. Below, Table 2 shows the type of analysis that was used for demographic descriptive information.

**Table 2 Demographic Descriptive Information**

<b>Type of Analysis</b>	<b>Based on Institutions</b>
Percentage	Type (public or private) Program makeup (with or without dedicated young alumni program)

Question four began the forecasted survey questions that exposed the characteristics and departmental structure of young alumni. Specifically, these questions provided findings for the research questions “How do top research institutions define young alumni, and what are the structural characteristics and departmental oversight as it relates to young alumni engagement and development?” Through analysis of questions 4 through 23, a variety of characteristics, as well as how young alumni are defined, were reported. Question five provided an important variable in what percentage of the responding institutions have a dedicated young alumni program. Based on the response to this question, institutions were directed to one of two different groupings. If an institution reported having a dedicated young alumni program, then questions 6 to 15 appeared. If an institution reported not having a dedicated young alumni program, then questions 16 to 23 appeared. Below, in Table 3, is a complete list of the type of analysis as it relates to institutional characteristics and departmental structure.

**Table 3 Descriptive Characteristics and Departmental Structure**

<b>Type of Analysis</b>	<b>Based on Institutions</b>
Percentage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With dedicated young alumni programs</li> <li>• Definition of young alumni</li> <li>• Metrics to measure success</li> <li>• With student engagement and philanthropy programs</li> <li>• With strategic initiatives/programs to increase young alumni donor participation</li> </ul>
Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of staff dedicated to the young alumni program</li> <li>• Number of years the young alumni program has been in existence</li> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• Institutional buy-in</li> <li>• Department responsible for executing young alumni program</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>

The next set of questions provided analysis of the types of outreach and programming top research institutions use regarding young alumni. Questions 24 to 29 provided specific details on how often, for what reason, and through which channels institutions communicate with young

alumni. These types of outreach and programming are not impacted by whether or not the institutions have a young alumni program. The goal was simply to describe the young alumni outreach and programs. Below, Table 4 indicates the analysis for types of outreach and programming.

**Table 4 Descriptive Types of Outreach and Programming**

<b>Type of Analysis</b>	<b>Based on Institutions</b>
Percentage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of events</li> <li>• Soliciting for a specific area/fund identified by the institution</li> <li>• Types of outreach</li> <li>• Channel used to communicate</li> <li>• How young alumni make their gift</li> </ul>
Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of communications sent in total</li> <li>• Annual contribution amount</li> </ul>

The last set of survey questions, 30 to 33, analyzed young alumni donor behavior at top research institutions regarding donor participation and donation amount. Question 30 was important as it asked for the percentage of young alumni participation in fiscal year 2019. In a similar light, question 31 showed whether the young alumni donor participation had increased during the past five years. In order to identify findings that answer question 3 (how do young alumni donor participation rates and amounts differ between top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program?), two different two-way anova tests had to be run. The key values that are worth comparing are the young alumni donor participation rate and the annual contribution amount. The analysis looked at two factors: program setup (with or without a dedicated program) and institution type (public or private), as well as the combination of program setup and institution type. The analysis for young alumni donor behavior is shown in Table 5.



**Table 5 Donor Behavior Analysis**

<b>Type of Analysis</b>	<b>Based on Institutions</b>
Mean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young alumni donor participation rate in fiscal year 2019</li> <li>• Young alumni donor retention from 2018 to 2019</li> <li>• Young alumni donor participation in the past five years</li> </ul>
Two-Way Anova 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F Value for the program setup impact on young alumni donor participation rate</li> <li>• F Value for institution type impact on young alumni donor participation rate</li> <li>• F Value for interaction of both program setup and institution type impact on young alumni donor participation rate</li> <li>• P-Value is the probability of whether the difference is seen in setup, type, or the interaction of setup and type</li> </ul>
Two-Way Anova 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• F Value for the program setup impact on young alumni donation amount</li> <li>• F Value for institution type impact on young alumni donation amount</li> <li>• F Value for interaction of both program setup and institution type impact on young alumni donation amount</li> <li>• P-Value is the probability of whether the difference is seen in setup, type, or the interaction of setup and type</li> </ul>

Excel provided the percentages, means, and standard deviations for analysis indicated above in order to provide impactful descriptive statistics. After the survey questions were answered and analyzed as indicated in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, the data was reviewed through a deductive lens to answer the three inquiry questions presented at the beginning of this chapter.

These conclusions have shown how top research institutions define young alumni, the characteristics and departmental structure related to young alumni, the types of outreach and programming that are used, and how young alumni donor behaviors compare between top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program. Ultimately, the researcher provides suggested implications of the quantitative research.

### 3.5 Researcher's Reflexivity

After a collegiate volleyball career as both a player and coach, I came to Pitt as an employment development specialist at the university's Career Center (Student Affairs), where I worked with local, national, and global employers who recruit and hire Pitt students. Before coming to Pitt, I held roles at the University of Connecticut and Georgetown University. I also worked for a previous period of time at Pitt. In 2018, I became the assistant director of Young Alumni Engagement in Annual Programs in the Division of Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement at Pitt. It was in executing the responsibilities of this position that my interest in this research began. The need to increase young alumni engagement and giving is a critical mandate.

Today, I am the director of Panthers Forward, a new initiative at Pitt that addresses student debt and young alumni engagement. My passion for combatting student debt and supporting young alumni aligned with the research completed for this study to be of benefit for the program. Due to the increase in the number of degrees conferred each year, juxtaposed with a decrease in alumni giving, the young alumni donor participation focus of my research was a priority not only for the program I oversee but also for leadership of the university.

In fiscal year 2018, young alumni donor participation at Pitt was 1.8% and in fiscal year 2019, the young alumni donor participation rate was 1.9%. In order to increase this percentage, Pitt is dedicated to expanding its understanding of young alumni engagement, fundraising, and communication. This study, which examines young alumni programs as well as young alumni donor participation and characteristics, will greatly benefit Pitt.

It would be easy for me to anecdotally explain why, as a young alumna myself, I see the benefit in programs that connect young alumni with the institutions from which they graduated, but the reality is that data needs to drive decisions. This study will give universities that are near

and dear to my heart the ability to enhance programs while becoming more strategic when it comes to positively impacting critical needs, specifically funding.

### **3.6 Researcher's Epistemology**

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research identified three ethical principles and six norms that guide scientific post-positivist research. The three ethical principles are beneficence, respect, and justice. The six norms are use of valid research design, researcher competency, understanding consequences of research, identifying appropriate sample selection, voluntary participation, and eliminating harm (Mertens, 2015). I am confident that my approach to this research as well as my worldview aligned with these standards and post-positivism epistemology; they are important to who I am as a researcher.

Post-positivism allowed me to examine and measure my research to identify characteristics and relationships between variables (Mertens, 2015). It factored into my perspective of the world, thus affecting my view of the research. Knowing the unlikelihood of arriving at an absolute truth or proof of the theory tested in this study, I sought to learn more about the structural characteristics of institutions, different types of outreach and programming at those institutions, and young alumni donor behaviors at institutions that have dedicated young alumni programs and those that do not (Mertens, 2015). The fact that that post-positivism involves the belief that it is important to be objective and generalize based on probability rather than certainty is another reason why it was the right epistemology for this research (Mertens, 2015). The post-positivism lens kept me from bringing my personal bias to the work, neutralizing the research and outcomes.

### 3.7 Limitations

The limitations of this research are both universal and research-specific. Universally, Peter Nardi (2018) expresses one limitation when choosing how to conduct quantitative research in *Doing Survey Research*, stating that this approach to understanding the social world can only answer some questions, and it is only as impactful as the questions that are presented to the audience. Nardi also discusses access limitations for web-based surveys. Fortunately for this research, the web-based survey went to employees of higher education institutions who were equipped with the necessary technology, so there were not challenges when it came to access and data collection.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a limitation to the success of this study. The data-collection process was delayed due to nationwide stay-at-home orders and precautionary measures. The email asking institutions to participate in the survey was sent shortly after many of them had transitioned from a “normal” on-campus environment to “virtual learning” for the remainder of the academic year. In light of these challenges, I worked with committee members, university leadership, and a research advisor to determine the most responsible and appropriate data-collection process. Ultimately, there was a delay to the data collection, particularly once Pitt moved to remote learning and work.

The voluntary nature of the research survey was another limitation in the sense that the number of institutions that opted to respond was outside of my control, despite my best possible efforts to ensure I had a large number of respondents. However, survey abandonment was minimal due to the importance of this topic for institutions and the willingness to share findings upon completion (Balch, 2010). Institutions that did respond did so on a self-reported basis, so I had to put significant trust in the respondent to provide accurate and reliable data. Additionally, the data

requested was not necessarily readily available. Cross-departmental communication at institutions was necessary in order for institutions to respond.

Last, the nature of closed-ended questions was a limitation. Data can be oversimplified and not represent the respondent's full response. In an effort to address this limitation, the survey was developed after an exhaustive review of research and works to provide a broad series of response options.

## **4.0 Research Results**

This chapter provides an overview of the responses received to this study's survey questions and includes tables of the results broken down by inquiry question. Specifically, the chapter presents results on how top research institutions define young alumni and the characteristics and departmental structures that exist as they relate to young alumni engagement and development. These results also demonstrate the types of outreach and programming top research institutions use to engage young alumni. Finally, this chapter explores how young alumni donor participation rates differ between top research institutions that have young alumni programs and those that do not.

### **4.1 Definitions, Characteristics, and Structures**

**Inquiry Question 1: “How do top research institutions define young alumni, and what are the characteristics and departmental structures relating to young alumni engagement and development?”**

Results from the survey data show how responding institutions define “young alumni” as well as what characteristics and departmental structures those institutions have in place for young alumni engagement and development, as demonstrated in the tables below. Table 6 is broken into two columns: institutions that indicated having a dedicated young alumni program and those that indicated not having such a program. The percent responding yes to survey questions regarding

how an institution defines young alumni, metrics to measure success, student programs, and strategic initiatives is reported.

**Table 6 Characteristics and Departmental Structure Results**

<i>Characteristics and departmental structure of young alumni</i> <i>Percent responding yes</i>		
Question:	With dedicated young alumni program (n=28) %	Without dedicated young alumni program (n=8) %
How does your institution define young alumni by years since graduation (time since degree completion)?	46%	54%
Does your institution define young alumni by a combination of years since graduation, age, and/or degree type?	46%	38%
Does your institutions define young alumni by age (specific age derived from birthdate)?	8%	12%
Do you have metrics to measure the success of the young alumni program?	68%	62%
Do you have metrics to measure the success of young alumni based on alumni participation in events?	68%	62%
Do you have metrics to measure the success of young alumni based on alumni donor participation?	54%	62%
Do you have metrics to measure the success of young alumni based on alumni volunteering/mentoring?	54%	62%
Do you have metrics to measure the success of young alumni based on alumni donor dollars?	29%	32%
Does your institution have any strategic initiatives/programs intending to increase alumni donor participation?	82%	38%
Do you have a student engagement and philanthropy program?	4%	100%

The majority of institutions without dedicated young alumni programs define “young alumni” based on the number of years since graduation —the time since degree completion (54%). The highest percentage of responding institutions that have dedicated young alumni programs define “young alumni” either based on years since graduation or based on a combination of years since graduation, age (derived from date of birth), and/or degree type (46%). A small percentage of institutions report that they define “young alumni” solely by age (derived from date of birth);

this is the case both for institutions that have and those that do not have dedicated young alumni programs, at 8% and 12%, respectively.

The second section in Table 6 shows how institutions measure success. The dominant metrics for success used by institutions both with and without dedicated young alumni programs is the rate of alumni participation in events, alumni donor participation, and alumni volunteering/mentoring. For institutions with dedicated young alumni programs, 68% measure success based on alumni participation in events. At institutions that do not have dedicated young alumni programs, 62% report measuring success based on alumni participation in events. Alumni donor participation and young alumni volunteering/mentoring are metrics to measure success at 54% of institutions with dedicated young alumni programs and at 62% of institutions without a dedicated young alumni program. Metrics to measure success based on young alumni donor dollars is the least reported metric for success for both groups of institutions (32% for institutions without dedicated young alumni programs and 29% for institutions with young alumni programs).

The last section of Table 6 shows whether institutions use student engagement and philanthropy programs and/or strategic initiatives/programs as a means to increase alumni donor participation. A significant number of institutions with dedicated young alumni programs (82%) report having strategic initiatives/programs intending to increase alumni donor participation. For institutions without dedicated young alumni programs, 38% report using strategic initiatives/programs to increase alumni donor participation. One hundred percent of responding institutions that do not have dedicated young alumni programs report that they do have student engagement and philanthropy programs while only 4% of the institutions with a dedicated young alumni program have a student engagement and philanthropy program.



In addition to reporting the percentage of institutions responding “yes” in Table 6, Table 7 provides the mode by asking participating institutions about the young alumni-oriented characteristics and departmental structures they have in place. Responding institutions select responses from a set list of options, and the data in Table 7 depicts the response that was chosen most frequently. Questions reported by mode ask about challenges to young alumni engagement and fundraising, the number of staff dedicated to young alumni responsibilities, the department responsible for such activities, and details about young alumni programs at institutions that have them. Due to the nature of certain questions in the survey asking about program details, there is only data from institutions that have dedicated young alumni programs. “N/a” is shown in the data for institutions who reported not having dedicated young alumni programs.

**Table 7 Characteristics and Departmental Structure Results Cont'd**

*Characteristics and departmental structure of young alumni (mode)*

Question:	With dedicated young alumni program (n=28)	Without dedicated young alumni program (n=8)
To what extent do you believe “accurate young alumni contact information” is a challenge to the young alumni engagement and fundraising at your institution?	Very (50%)	Moderately (50%)
To what extent do you believe the “amount of young alumni student debt” is a challenge to the young alumni engagement and fundraising at your institution?	Very (32%)	Moderately (50%)
To what extent do you believe “young alumni dissatisfaction with student experience” is a challenge to the young alumni engagement and fundraising at your institution?	Slightly (44%)	Slightly (38%)
To what extent do you believe “geographical factors” is a challenge to the young alumni engagement and fundraising at your institution?	Moderately (39%) Slightly (39%)	Moderately (38%)
How many staff have dedicated young alumni responsibility?	1-2 (71%)	1-2 (50%)
How long has the young alumni program been in existence?	More than 6 years	n/a
Does the young alumni program have a dedicated budget?	Yes (62%)	n/a
To what extent do you feel that you have “financial buy-in” from the presidential/chancellor level for your young alumni program:	Moderately (43%)	n/a
To what extent do you feel that you have “program mission buy-in” from the presidential/chancellor level for your young alumni program?	Very (54%)	n/a
What department is responsible for executing the young alumni program?	Alumni Association	n/a
Given that your institution does not have a dedicated young alumni program, is a department responsible for young alumni engagement?	n/a	Yes (75%) Alumni Association & Advancement
Given that your institution does not have a dedicated young alumni program, is a department responsible for young alumni fundraising?	n/a	88% Alumni Association & Advancement

Table 7 starts by showing the extent of impact regarding young alumni engagement and fundraising related to challenges for institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs. Response options for these questions range from “not at all,” “slightly,” “moderately,” “very,” and “extremely.” Institutions with dedicated young alumni programs most often report that “accurate young alumni contact information” and “amount of young alumni student debt” are “very” challenging, the second-highest response option. Institutions without dedicated young alumni programs did not report any of the challenges as “very” or “extremely” challenging most often. Institutions without young alumni programs most frequently report the following as “moderately” challenging: “accurate young alumni contact information,” “amount of young alumni student debt,” and “geographical factors.” Institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs both report having one to two staff members dedicated to young alumni responsibilities.

The second portion of Table 7 includes information that was asked only of institutions with dedicated young alumni programs. The same five-option range of response on the extent of challenge is used here. Of institutions with dedicated young alumni programs, a majority respond with “moderate” related to financial buy-in from the presidential/chancellor level and “very” related to the amount of program mission buy-in from the presidential/chancellor level. The table also indicates the department most often responsible for executing their young alumni programs. Institutions that have a dedicated young alumni program report that the alumni association was the department most often responsible for executing the program, while institutions without dedicated

young alumni programs report that the alumni association and advancement office are most often responsible for young alumni engagement and young alumni fundraising.

## 4.2 Types of Outreach and Programming

**Inquiry Question 2: “What types of outreach and programming are top research institutions using as it relates to young alumni?”**

This question does not look for comparisons between institutions with and without young alumni programming. Instead, it addresses the types of young alumni outreach and programming that exist at the entire sample of responding top research institutions. Table 8 shows what types of programming responding institutions offer when it comes to young alumni engagement.

**Table 8 Types of Programming Results**

*Types of programming (events) for young alumni (n=36)  
Percent responding yes*

Question	Percent responding Yes
Does your institution host “networking” events for young alumni?	89%
Does your institution host “career development” events for young alumni?	72%
Does your institution host “athletic related events (game watches/tailgates)” events for young alumni?	67%
Does your institution host “service projects/volunteering” events for young alumni?	61%
Does your institution host “donor development” events for young alumni?	33%
Does your institution host “donor stewardship” events for young alumni?	31%
Does your institution host “financial literacy” events for young alumni?	19%
Are young alumni solicited for one specific area/fund identified by the institution?	14%

An overwhelming majority of institutions report that they host networking events (89%), offer career development (72%), hold athletic-related events (67%), and offer service projects/volunteering events (61%) for young alumni. Events focused on financial literacy received the lowest number of responses (19%). The increase in the amount of student debt and the challenge of engaging young alumni in fundraising efforts as they face managing their student debt create an opportunity to hold a series of events that would address this issue, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. The last question in Table 8 asks whether young alumni are solicited for a specific area or fund predetermined by the institution, with 14% of institutions stating they are.

Moving beyond the types of events that top research institutions host for young alumni, the survey asks about the tactics behind young alumni communication efforts. Five tactic options from which respondents could choose are shown in Table 9. They include “engagement/coming to events (invitations),” “volunteering/mentoring,” “solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused),” “stewardship,” and “publications (updates/newsletters).” Table 9 shows the number of times in an academic year that each outreach tactic was used to communicate with young alumni.

**Table 9 Types of Outreach Results**

*Types of outreach to young alumni (n=36) (percentage)*

Question	0	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-8 times	More than 8 times	Do not know
How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding “engagement/coming to events (invitations)”	0%	8%	12%	8%	64%	8%
How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding “Publications (updates/newsletters)”	0%	8%	22%	3%	47%	20%
How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding “volunteering/mentoring”	3%	25%	44%	3%	8%	17%

How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding “stewardship (thank-you’s)”	0%	36%	42%	4%	0%	18%
How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding “solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused)”	0%	17%	31%	5%	33%	14%

A majority of respondents (64%) report that they communicate with young alumni most frequently about “engagement/coming to events (invitations),” reaching out more than eight times per academic year on this topic. This is the only communication tactic in which a majority of institutions report sending the same number of communications for the same purpose. Forty-seven percent of respondents state that they send more than eight communications per academic year regarding “publications,” and 44% report sending four to six missives on “volunteering/mentoring.” The “stewardship” tactic is used the least frequently, with more than 75% of respondents stating they send such communication either one to three or four to six times per academic year.

The survey goes on to ask the channel of communication used by institutions to communicate with young alumni. The survey offered six response options, the top five of which are included in Table 10; they are: “direct mail,” “email,” “text message,” “telephone,” and “social media.”

**Table 10 Channel of Communication Results**

*Channel used to communicate with young alumni (n=36) (percentage)*

Question	Social Media	Email	Text Messages	Direct Mail	Telephone	Other
What channel is used to communicate with young alumni regarding “engagement/coming to events (invitations)”	97%	94%	27%	33%	19%	6%
What channel is used to communicate with young alumni regarding “volunteering/mentoring”	81%	97%	14%	17%	6%	6%

What channel is used to communicate with young alumni regarding “solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused)”	78%	100%	44%	83%	67%	6%
What channel is used to communicate with young alumni regarding “publications (updates/newsletters)”	56%	97%	3%	72%	3%	6%
What channel is used to communicate with young alumni regarding “stewardship (thank-you’s)”	50%	97%	22%	72%	31%	0%

Overall, social media and email are the primary channels of communication used to reach young alumni, regardless of topic. Of the responding institutions, 97% use social media to communicate about “engagement/coming to events,” 97% use email to communicate about “volunteering/mentoring,” “publications,” and “stewardship,” respectively, and 100% of responding institutions use email for “solicitations.” When it comes to fundraising, 83% state they use direct mail, 78% use social media, 67% use telephone, and 44% use text messages.

The world is functioning increasingly based on mobile; 98% of sent text messages are read and 90% of those texts are read within the first three minutes of receipt. However, a majority of institutions do not use text messaging for any of the outreach purposes provided in this survey (MobileCause, 2018). Respondents indicated having the most diffuse method for communication regarding solicitations (development or fundraising). A significant percentage of respondents (more than 65%) report social media, email, direct mail, and telephone as channels currently used for solicitations. Another significant finding is that while social media is used for engagement/coming to events, it is the only other channel and topic that reports being used at a rate of 90% or higher, besides email.

As reported by top research institutions, Table 11 exhibits the channels used by young alumni to make their gifts back to the institutions. This question was presented to respondents with

a five-option response range, from “not at all” to “most often,” with “often” as the median. Table 11 displays the responses found in the survey.

**Table 11 Gifts to the Institution**

How young alumni make their gift (n=36) (percentage)

Question	Not at all	Less Often	Often	More Often	Most Often
To what extent do young alumni choose “direct mail” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	9%	69%	19%	3%	0%
To what extent do young alumni choose “email” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	3%	25%	31%	28%	13%
To what extent do young alumni choose “text message” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	36%	45%	11%	8%	0%
To what extent do young alumni choose “telephone” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	6%	57%	31%	6%	0%
To what extent do young alumni choose “social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	19%	48%	19%	11%	3%
To what extent do young alumni choose “electronic payment” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	8%	19%	23%	33%	17%
To what extent do young alumni choose “personal outreach” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	6%	36%	39%	11%	8%
To what extent do young alumni choose “crowdfunding” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	11%	8%	36%	31%	14%
To what extent do young alumni choose “day of giving” as the channel to make a gift to your institution	6%	8%	19%	28%	39%



The responses to this question are quite varied. The “day of giving” option has the highest percentage of “most often” responses at 39%. It is worth noting that the concept of a “day of giving” is relatively new to higher education. These giving days typically include challenge dollars and a short timeframe of 24 to 36 hours in which to fundraise. They increasingly take place online, often with giving encouraged from a mobile device, and provide participants with a sense of having been impactful. The second “most often” channel young alumni use to make a gift is electronic payment. Text message received the highest percentage (36%) of “not at all” responses. The data spreads across all channels and is not concentrated in any one response option.

The final table of data from Inquiry Question 2 broke down the responding institutions by those with dedicated young alumni programs and those without. The information in this table reports the mode.

**Table 12 Number of Communications and Amount**

Number of communications sent to young alumni and amount (mode)

Question:	With dedicated young alumni program (n=28) X	Without dedicated young alumni program (n=8) X
In total, how many times in an academic year are young alumni sent communication?	More than 20 times (50%)	More than 20 times (75%)
What is the average annual contribution amount of a young alumnus/a?	\$50-\$99 (36%)	\$25-\$49 (38%)

For institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs, the institution sends more than 20 communications to young alumni in an academic year. This was the highest level of response options on a five-point scale. Regarding average annual contribution amount, institutions with dedicated young alumni programs have a higher mode of \$50-\$99 annual contributions than institutions without such programs. For institutions without dedicated young alumni programs, the average annual contribution amounts were in the \$25-\$49 range.

### 4.3 Donor Behaviors

**Inquiry Question 3:** *“How do young alumni donor participation rates and amounts differ between top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program?”*

The focus of the final research question for this study was based on comparing young alumni donor behavior at institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs. The survey asks participating institutions about their young alumni donor participation rates in fiscal year 2019, young alumni donor participation rates in the past five years, and whether young alumni donor participation has increased during the past five years. Not all survey participants answered these questions, changing the data set: 20 institutions with dedicated young alumni programs and seven institutions without such programs provided information for this question. Of the institutions with dedicated young alumni programs, 13 are public and seven are private. Of the seven institutions without dedicated young alumni programs, four are public and three are private.

The need to address the public versus private aspect of institutions, in addition to seeking comparisons between schools with and without dedicated young alumni programs, is because both are factors in analyzing and understanding young alumni donor behavior. Table 13 depicts this information; the data therein has been rounded to the nearest percent.

**Table 13 Donor Behavior Results***Young alumni donor behavior (mean)*

Question:	With dedicated young alumni program (n=20) X		Without dedicated young alumni program (n=7) X	
	Public (n=13)	Private (n=7)	Public (n=4)	Private (n=3)
What is the percentage of young alumni donor participation in fiscal year 2019 at your institution?	5%	16%	5%	24%
What percentage of young alumni donors did your institution retain from fiscal year 2018 to fiscal year 2019?	21%	30%	28%	53%
Has the percentage of young alumni donor participation increased during the past five years (percent responding yes)?	56%	70%	40%	66%

Private institutions both with and without dedicated young alumni programs report higher young alumni donor participation in fiscal year 2019 than public institutions. Private institutions without dedicated young alumni programs have a young alumni donor participation rate of 24%, while public institutions also lacking such programming have a 5% young alumni donor participation rate. Private institutions with dedicated young alumni programs have a young alumni donor participation rate of 16%, while public schools with similar programs have a 5% young alumni donor participation rate. Thus, private institutions—whether with or without young alumni programs—have higher participation rates than public, although it is the case that public institutions with young alumni programs have higher participation than those without. This is reversed for private institutions. The outlying data from private institutions is cause for the separate reporting between private and public institutions.

Similar to young alumni donor participation, the rate of young alumni donor retention at private institutions between fiscal year 2018 and 2019 is dramatically higher than at public institutions, as shown in Table 13. All three of the private institutions without dedicated young alumni programs retained more than 45% of their young alumni donors and two retained more

than 50%. Private institutions without dedicated young alumni programs retained 53% of young alumni donors from fiscal year 2018 to fiscal year 2019, and public institutions without dedicated young alumni programs retained 28% of young alumni donors during the two years. Private institutions with dedicated young alumni programs retained 30% of young alumni donors from fiscal year 2018 to 2019, and public institutions with such programs retained 21% of young alumni donors across that time period. This data shows that private institutions with young alumni programs saw the largest increase in young alumni donor participation (70%).

To fully answer Inquiry Question 3, additional inquiry is necessary into the young alumni donor behavior at institutions with dedicated young alumni programs compared to institutions without dedicated young alumni programs. The key values worth comparing are the young alumni donor participation rate and the average annual contribution amount of young alumni. The analysis in this study looks at both factors—program makeup (with or without a dedicated program) and institution type (public or private)—as well as the combination of program makeup then institution type. In order to analyze all three factors appropriately, this study used two-way ANOVA tests rather than t-tests. This analysis determines whether two populations are statistically different and is a common practice.

The purpose of the first ANOVA was to determine whether 1) the program makeup has a significant effect on young alumni donor participation; 2) the institution type has a significant effect on young alumni donor participation; and 3) the interaction between program makeup and private or public characterization, and the effect that connection has on young alumni donor participation. The p value of  $<.05$  is the standard being used to determine statistical significance. Table 14 displays the data used to run the two-way ANOVA focused on young alumni donor participation rate.

**Table 14 Participation Rate**

Means and Standard Deviations for Institutions: participation rate

	Institution Type	Mean	SD
Institutions with young alumni programs	Public	5.3	2.77
	Private	15.5	10.43
Institutions without young alumni programs	Public	4.6	3.78
	Private	24.2	16.42

The mean of young alumni donor participation rate at private institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs is higher than the mean at public institutions. The table also shows public institutions that have young alumni programs have higher young alumni participation rates than those that do not, which is opposite for privates. The standard deviations are close for public institutions while private institutions are much higher. This shows that there is a lot more variation in young alumni donor participation at private institutions than at public institutions, regardless of whether they have a dedicated young alumni program or not. This fact indicates that some private institutions have extremely high young alumni donor participation while others have extremely low young alumni donor participation. Public institutions, on the other hand, have consistently low donor participation across the board.

The results of this test show that the program makeup, being whether an institution has or does not have a dedicated young alumni program (f value = 1.87, p value = 4.28), does not have a significant effect on the young alumni donor participation rate. The institution type, public or private (f value = 26, p value = 4.28), does have a significant effect on the young alumni donor participation rate. Private institutions, both with and without young alumni programs, have higher young alumni participation rates than public institutions. However, the interaction between

program makeup and institution type (f value = -3.64, p value = 4.28) does not have a significant effect on such rates. Private institutions without young alumni programs have the highest young alumni donor participation rates, and public institutions with young alumni programs have higher young alumni donor participation rates than the public institutions without young alumni programs.

The second two-way ANOVA conducted for this study looks at donation amounts among young alumni. The survey asked institutions to select a value range, with each range delineated by a numerical value: 1 represents \$.01-\$4.99; 2 represents \$5-\$24.99; 3 represents \$25-\$49.99; 4 represents \$50-\$99; and 5 represents \$100-\$999. With these ranges, this two-way ANOVA was tested to learn whether 1) program makeup (with or without a dedicated young alumni program) has a significant effect on young alumni donation amounts; 2) institution type (public or private) has a significant effect on young alumni donation amounts; and 3) the interaction between program makeup and institution type has a significant effect on young alumni donation amounts. The p value of <.05 is the standard being used to determine statistical significance. The data of this two-way ANOVA is shown in Table 15.

**Table 15 Donation Amount**

Means and Standard Deviations for Institutions: donation amount

	Institution Type	Mean	SD
Institutions with young alumni programs	Public	3.4	1.04
	Private	3.7	1.34
Institutions without young alumni programs	Public	3.8	1.30
	Private	3.3	.58

The survey indicates that neither program makeup (f value = 0, p value = 4.17) or institution type

(f value = .06, p value = 4.17) has a significant effect on young alumni donation amounts. The interaction between program make-up and institution type (f value = -2.82, p value= 4.17) also does not significantly impact young alumni donation amounts.

The second two-way ANOVA rejects the idea that an institution's young alumni program makeup has an impact on the donation amounts from young alumni. It also rejects the idea that whether an institution is private or public plays a role in the amount young alumni are willing to donate to their alma maters. Last, the two-way ANOVA finds no meaningful correlation between the young alumni program makeup and the private or public status of an institution when it comes to the amount young alumni are willing to donate.

Ultimately, the two-way ANOVA tests show no statistical difference or impact from institutions with dedicated young alumni programs and those without relating to young alumni donation amounts or young alumni donor participation rate. The institution identity (public or private) does impact the young alumni participation rate but not the young alumni donation amounts. Overall, private institutions have higher donor participation than public institutions irrespective of having a dedicated young alumni program or not.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study has examined characteristics, departmental structure, challenges, communication, and donor behavior related to young alumni at top research institutions. The sample surveyed for this study was a group of top research institutions as reported in the 2017 *Top American Research Universities* report created by MUP. The report represents a diverse sample of private and public institutions. The research is important because alumni are the largest group of contributors for institutions, giving about a quarter of all philanthropic donations. However, alumni participation rates are declining, so efforts need to be made by institutions to continue to understand and plan effectively (Blumenstyk, 2015; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). This chapter used descriptive statistics to summarize, make meaning, and discuss the findings of this research as well as share the implications of the data.

The discussion in this chapter concentrated on the findings related to young alumni program makeup, referring to whether the top research institution reported a dedicated young alumni program or not. Next, the chapter focuses on the definition of young alumni, communication channels used to engage young alumni, the content of those communications by top research institutions, and young alumni average donation amounts irrespective of young alumni program makeup. Finally, this chapter explores the data as it relates to top research institutions' identity, that is, whether the institution is public or private. This research provides critical information from top colleges and universities, allowing peers to continue to enhance strategic planning related to young alumni donor participation.



## 5.1 Young Alumni Program Makeup

One of the major aspects that this study investigated was how survey data from top research institutions with dedicated young alumni programs compared to data from institutions without dedicated young alumni programs. What I found was that, except in a few places, patterns were similar for institutions whether they had dedicated young alumni programs or not. Both groups of top research institutions had similar characteristics and departmental structure related to young alumni. Strategic effort and planning were also similar at institutions with dedicated young alumni programs and institutions without dedicated young alumni programs. Both groups of top research institutions reported similar metrics to measure success, departmental structure, retention, and challenges. These findings indicated that the young alumni audience are part of top research institutions' strategic plans because responsibilities and resources are allocated to that audience.

A series of questions related to metrics to measure success, structure, retention, and challenges displayed similarities among institutions with and without dedicated young alumni programs. The study found that both groups of top research institutions measured success based on young alumni participation in events, donor participation rate, volunteering, and mentoring—with the highest percentage of institutions measuring success based on participation in events and donor participation rate. Another similarity for top research institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs related to staffing structure. This data revealed that the majority of top research institutions have one to two staff responsible for executing young alumni responsibilities within the institution's alumni association. For these reasons, even top research institutions who indicated not having a dedicated young alumni program actually have a quasi or a self-styled program in practice without calling it or branding it as a dedicated young alumni program.

Based on the findings, regardless of young alumni program make-up, the percentage of young alumni donor participation in 2019 is lower than the percentage of young alumni donor retention from 2018 to 2019. This starts to indicate young alumni donor retention is not as challenging as getting the young alumni to give in the first place which is not the case for alumni donor initial participation and retention with the alumni population outside the young alumni audience.

All top research institutions similarly reported that they perceive student debt and young alumni contact information as the most significant challenges to young alumni engagement and fundraising. Given that the national student loan debt total is more than \$1.56 trillion dollars and the average student loan payment for a borrower is estimated at \$393 per month, it is hard to get additional financial contributions from young alumni (Forbes, 2020). From my professional experience, young alumni often respond to solicitations and indicate that until their student loan debt is gone, they will never give a gift to the institution. These results may mean that institutions need to understand the financial burden and constraints of their young alumni and be aware of this burden. Donor development programs could sympathize with this mindset and work to enhance young alumni philanthropic knowledge. Additionally, not having current and accurate young alumni contact information is a significant hurdle to engaging and soliciting young alumni.

Two differences between institutions with dedicated young alumni programs and those without did exist in the descriptive findings. First, the research displayed a difference in the average donation amount for institutions with dedicated young alumni programs versus institutions without dedicated young alumni programs. Institutions with dedicated young alumni programs had a higher average annual donation amount of \$50-\$99 while institutions without dedicated young alumni programs had an average amount of \$25-\$49. Despite this difference, the two-way

ANOVA results show no statistical difference in the dedicated young alumni program makeup impacting this difference in donation amount. Based on the questions in this research referring to metrics that measure success, donation amount is not the priority for top research institutions; participation is what is important. The two-way ANOVA results also showed no statistical difference in the dedicated young alumni program makeup impacting donor participation rate.

The second difference in findings from institutions with dedicated young alumni programs is the percentage of institutions that indicated having a student engagement and philanthropy program. A very small percentage of institutions with dedicated young alumni programs reported having a student engagement and philanthropy program but did report having strategic initiatives meant to increase alumni donor participation. Every institution in this study without a dedicated young alumni program indicated having a student engagement and philanthropy program, and a much smaller percentage reported having strategic initiatives intending to increase alumni donor participation. These findings showed that top research institutions with dedicated young alumni programs focused on donor participation after graduation, while institutions without dedicated young alumni programs focused on students by implementing the alumni-in-training strategy. The alumni-in-training philosophy means institutions dedicate engagement efforts and strategy during the student years to build positive experiences and impact alumni giving in the future (Pumerantz, 2005).

Differences exist in donation amount as well as student engagement and philanthropic programs, but the two-way ANOVA tests show that having a dedicated young alumni program does not impact young alumni donation amounts or young alumni donor participation rates. No statistical difference exists in these two donor behaviors at institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs. Metrics that measure success, structure, and the challenges institutions

face are factors with similar focus and effort for young alumni at all top research institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs.

## **5.2 Defining Young Alumni, Communication Channels, Amount, and Content**

This portion of the results looks at the entire sample population without considering the relationship between institutions with or without dedicated young alumni programs. Here is when the research explores how top research institutions define young alumni and how institutions communicate with young alumni.

### **5.2.1 Defining Young Alumni and Communication Channels**

As the results show, top research institutions defined young alumni based on an individual's time away from the institution. Given that this is the case, institutions will need to keep in mind how different generations receive information. Institutions may benefit from understanding their young alumni audience because the age of the individuals within the institution's young alumni audience is not necessarily limited to young people. The audience may include alumni from varying generations who interpret and receive information differently. Customizing outreach based on age and generation is key to creating lifelong connections (Engagement Strategies Group, 2010).

Past studies have shown that older alumni have a stronger preference for direct mail than younger alumni (Afolayan, 2012). This research showed that email and social media are the channels used most often by top research institutions when communicating to young alumni, while

text message is the channel of communication used least often. Based on the fact that 98% of text messages are being read and 90% of those read text messages are read within the first three minutes, text messaging is an underutilized channel of communication for top research institutions (MobileCause, 2018). Though institutions reported using email and social media to communicate with young alumni, the findings of this study show that young alumni make their gift most often through the following channels: 1) day of giving; 2) crowdfunding; and 3) electronic payment/websites. It is possible that young alumni make their gift on one of those platforms in response to an email, but that is not known. This finding connects with the idea that alumni younger in age need more instant mobile-friendly communication (Afolayan, 2012).

### **5.2.2 Communication Amount and Content**

The research from this study indicated top research institutions are communicating with young alumni more than 20 times in an academic year, which is nearly twice a month. This means young alumni are receiving a lot of content from institutions. Results show that content is most often regarding engagement/coming to events and solicitations. The fact that donor participation and young alumni participation in events are metrics used to measure success for top research institutions is not surprising because it aligns with the relationship between donor participation and institutional rankings in *U.S. News & World Report* and MUP and also acknowledges the value of engaged alumni.

Based on findings, the types of programs top research institutions are inviting young alumni to focus on are networking, career development, and athletic-related events. Top research institutions do not indicate asking young alumni to come to events focused specifically on financial literacy, donor development, or donor stewardship. Institutions communicate often to young

alumni about coming to events, and while there is value in having alumni engaged by attending any event, institutions may also benefit from taking the opportunity to increase philanthropic education and stewardship as part of the programming. This shift and addition to programming will help top research institutions work toward higher young alumni donor participation rates.

### **5.3 Public and Private Institutions**

A finding that emerged during data analysis was related to institutional identity, whether an institution is public or private. Based on the two-way ANOVA tests, the data demonstrated that an institution's identity (public or private) had an impact on donor participation rate but not on donation amounts. Private top research institutions have more elevated young alumni donor behaviors across the board than public institutions. Public institutions have consistently lower donor participation and retention while private institutions have consistently higher donor participation and retention. The results show private institutions have also seen a greater increase in donor participation during the past five years than public institutions, which means young alumni at private institutions are giving more often, and continue giving. Understanding why private institutions have higher donor participation will be discussed when thinking about future research because it takes the discussion from the institutional level to the unit level.

An extremely large variance exists among private institutions young alumni donor participation. Some private institutions have extremely high participation while other private institutions have extremely low participation. All participation at private institutions is higher than participation at public institutions, but within the private institutions themselves a significant discrepancy is present. This means that private institutions with lower donor participation and

donation amounts are vastly different from the private institutions with high donor participation and donation amounts. Private institutions do have higher participation rates overall, but only certain private institutions have the highest donor participation rates, which is known because of the high standard deviation. With consistently lower donor participation and smaller standard deviation across all public institutions, it means public top research institutions are more similar than private institutions.

#### **5.4 Implications**

The main implication from this study is the importance of having strategic effort dedicated to young alumni while understanding that having a dedicated young alumni program or not does not statistically impact young alumni donation amounts or participation rate. The finding of this research confirms that top research institutions, whether or not they have dedicated young alumni programs, are placing the same amount of strategic energy on the young alumni audience. Just having a dedicated young alumni program will not affect young alumni donation amounts or young alumni donor participation. To impact young alumni engagement and fundraising, the following approaches arose from the data.

An important implication is the effort to include student engagement/philanthropy programs and strategic initiatives. The data illustrated that top research institutions have either strategic initiatives to increase alumni donor participation or student engagement and philanthropy programs, but not both. A goal might be to have both strategic initiatives intending to increase alumni donor participation and student engagement and philanthropy programs. The strategic initiatives and the student program would complement each other and add to the idea of “alumni-

in-training” as well as appeal to an individual’s motivation to give. This approach would encourage early and continuous donor participation and establish patterns of giving later in life. The gift amount for students and young alumni is irrelevant; participation is critical (Turner, Merserve, & Bowen, 2001).

The next implications are in connection to the findings associated with young alumni communication. Text messaging is an underutilized channel of communication by top research institutions, given that young alumni have shorter attention spans, are more tech-savvy, and need more instant mobile-friendly communication (Afolayan, 2012). Text messages are read and read quickly, but less than half of the top research institutions use text messaging as a channel of communication for engagement, volunteering, mentoring, solicitations, publication, or stewardship. Other forms of communication, such as email, make sense as the world is moving in a mobile direction and email is often viewed on mobile devices, but it is important to remember that 75% of Millennials would rather give up the ability to talk and email on their smartphones than the ability to text (MobileCause, 2018). The use of text messaging to communicate with alumni is worth exploring to see whether it would result in an increase in young alumni giving and attendance at events/programs.

The results of this study bring us to a fourth implication—that institutions need to support young alumni in understanding the multiple ways that they can contribute philanthropically to the institution. This can be done by shifting or adding to existing programming at institutions in order to show the value of alumni engagement while also striving to achieve higher young alumni donor participation. Straight engagement events are valuable but do not necessarily increase young alumni participation rates, so institutions are missing an opportunity to expand programming to include philanthropic awareness. With alumni donor participation being the priority, programming



can include donor development, donor stewardship, and financial literacy. Institutions can use communications that have focused on getting young alumni to attend events as an opportunity to address challenges such as student debt and increase philanthropic understanding. Development events would address the motivation to give, regardless of amount, while stewardship events would display the institution's gratitude while also showing the impact of giving. The Mood of Alumni survey (2010) reminds us that alumni want to know where their gift is going and the impact it is making. Being transparent about the importance and influence of a gift, of any size, is what young alumni want to see. Stewardship is part of the shift in content and programming that needs to be addressed. In order for young alumni to understand the impact of their gift, the content, stewardship, and communication strategy need to be enhanced across top research institutions.

To enable institutions to communicate this development, stewardship, and philanthropic educational content to young alumni, current and accurate contact information is critical. This refers to the last implication of this research, which focused on young alumni contact information and data. Institutions can address this implication in unique ways and by utilizing social media. Searching for individuals who might be alumni on social media and purchasing social space to include easily accessible "update your contact information" platforms for alumni might help institutions maintain up-to-date contact information. Another example of an institution taking a unique approach to updating young alumni contact information comes from Northwestern University. Northwestern used a Dyson vacuum giveaway as an incentive to enter the institution's "Spring Cleaning" raffle. Every graduate who provided updated contact information had a chance to win a new Dyson vacuum. In order to engage and receive gifts from young alumni, having accurate contact information for the strategic channels discussed is essential.

## 5.5 Applying Implications

For the work I do at Pitt through Panthers Forward, this research and its implications provided three specific aspects that could improve the program. One way would be to utilize resources already available at Pitt and implement new ideas right away. Panthers Forward has access to a texting platform, and the recommendation for implication is to leverage access to the texting platform to communicate with Panthers Forward young alumni regarding Pitt Day of Giving. Having access and applying text messaging is a unique opportunity that Panthers Forward can take utilize. Increasing the use of text messaging for Day of Giving will take the results of this study and implement a strategy to meet young alumni where they are, on their mobile device. After the text message is administered to Panthers Forward alumni on Pitt's Day of Giving, additional analysis will give the researcher additional information on how to continue moving forward.

Another way to apply the implications from this study is through personal outreach to Panthers Forward alumni. Many young alumni have not been entered into the university's model for identifying capacity to give and, as a result, have not yet been assigned to an institution staff person for prospect management. Panthers Forward has a staff of three with an additional staff person in the pipeline. The recommendation would be to work on identifying personal outreach opportunities and including frontline outreach and stewardship as part of the fourth staff position. The intention of this personal outreach would not be to close major gifts of large amounts but rather to build a relationship with young alumni and form a habit of giving to the university.

Last, with a manageable audience size, the Panthers Forward staff needs to be strategic about transitioning participating students to engaged alumni. The first step in this process would be to make sure the Panthers Forward office secures accurate mobile phone numbers, mailing

addresses, and email addresses for all participating students prior to graduation. This data is foundational to the ability to communicate through varying channels with influential content.

These three specific applications of this research for Panthers Forward are a result of the findings from this study. The implications will expand the program's existing strategy in an effort to increase the Panthers Forward young alumni donor participation rate and allow the program to become one of the few initiatives across the country that works to increase alumni donor participation while also being dedicated to student engagement and philanthropy.

## **5.6 Future Research**

Future research and analysis for this study could include looking at private institutions that have certain alumni profiles and what those institutions are doing. Gaining a deeper understanding of the private institutions that have more than 30% donor participation and learning if those actions can be replicated at a public institution would be worth pursuing. A further understanding of student and alumni demographics at private institutions might indicate that public institutions cannot replicate private institutions' models for donor participation. The student economic make-up at private institutions as well as alumni earning potential after graduation are two factors that, if found, would not be something public institutions could imitate. This research focused on the institutional level and the next step would be taking this research and moving to the student and alumni unit level.

Another area on the unit level that can be explored through future research is stratifying ways for alumni giving and understanding support for alumni and students. This research shows the importance of mobile friendly channels of communication but looking at the importance of

ease for the student and alumni is next. Are students and alumni more likely to give if digital wallets are part of the giving process. This additional exploration goes beyond the use of text message to understand the need for integration with platforms like Venmo, Apple Pay, etc.

Additional opportunities for research at the institutional level also exist. For example, it would be important to understand why email is most often used by top research institutions when communicating with young alumni, especially given that email is not reported as the channel used most often for giving. How the young alumni get to the day of giving, crowdfunding, or electronic payment option to make their gift is still unclear. It would be important to know if the awareness and access to a website, crowdfunding platforms, and day of giving was a result of an email. Another channel that top research institutions could explore to see if it is being underutilized in efforts to increase young alumni donor participation, in addition to text messaging, is personal outreach.

Last, additional research at the institutional level surrounding data collection would help identify how institutions can combat the challenge of maintaining accurate young alumni contact information. We do not know why institutions have trouble getting young alumni contact information. Is it because the institution does not collect the information or is the information collected but not shared across institutional divisions? Understanding the cause of the challenge would help to address the situation appropriately. This future research would require moving beyond the current PDSA cycle described for this research and initiating a new improvement science inquiry.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This research has provided an understanding of characteristics and departmental structure, including types of outreach and programming, as well as understanding donor behavior, specifically donor participation and donation amount, as it relates to young alumni at top research institutions. The study shared how institutions are cultivating and engaging the rapidly growing population of recent graduates, which has allowed institutions to learn from peers and provide benefits for strategic engagement and philanthropic planning.

This research showed that simply having a dedicated young alumni program will not impact young alumni donation amounts or young alumni donor participation. Top research institutions need to understand the demographics of their young alumni audience and segment it for generational communication. Additionally, all top research institutions need to explore additional uses of text messaging as a channel in communicating with young alumni. Programming can shift to show value while also working to address the goal of increasing donor participation. Communication about programming should remain, but the programming could expand to include development, stewardship, and financial planning. In conclusion, maintaining accurate alumni contact information is a significant challenge that needs to be combated. Through unique and organized planning, institutions need to better capture the contact information of students transitioning to alumni.

Top research institutions have many other institutional factors besides identity (public or private) and young alumni program makeup (having a dedicated young alumni program or not) that could impact donor participation rate and donation amounts; these factors could be explored further. This data supports that top research institutions need to develop strategic and well-

researched plans to increase the habit of giving by alumni, especially those who have recently graduated.

**Appendix A**  
**Top Research Universities**

<b>Relation</b>	<b>University</b>
Public	Arizona State University
Public	Auburn University
Private	Boston University
Private	Brandeis University
Private	Brown University
Private	California Institute of Technology
Private	Carnegie Mellon University
Private	Case Western Reserve University
Public	Clemson University
Public	Colorado State University–Fort Collins
Private	Columbia University
Private	Cornell University
Private	Dartmouth College
Private	Drexel University
Private	Duke University
Private	Emory University
Public	Florida State University
Public	George Mason University
Private	George Washington University
Private	Georgetown University
Public	Georgia Institute of Technology
Private	Harvard University
Public	Indiana University–Bloomington
Public	Iowa State University
Private	Johns Hopkins University
Public	Louisiana State University–Baton Rouge
Private	Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Public	Michigan State University
Public	New Jersey Institute of Technology
Private	New York University
Public	North Carolina State University
Private	Northeastern University
Private	Northwestern University
Public	Ohio State University–Columbus
Public	Oregon State University
Public	Pennsylvania State University–University Park
Private	Princeton University
Public	Purdue University–West Lafayette
Private	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Private	Rice University
Public	Rutgers University–New Brunswick
Private	Stanford University
Public	Stony Brook University
Public	Texas A&M University–College Station
Private	Tufts University
Private	Tulane University
Public	University at Buffalo
Public	University of Alabama–Birmingham
Public	University of Alabama–Huntsville
Public	University of Arizona
Public	University of California–Berkeley
Public	University of California–Davis
Public	University of California–Irvine
Public	University of California–Los Angeles
Public	University of California–Riverside
Public	University of California–San Diego
Public	University of California–Santa Barbara
Public	University of California–Santa Cruz
Public	University of Central Florida
Private	University of Chicago



Public	University of Cincinnati–Cincinnati
Public	University of Colorado–Boulder
Public	University of Colorado–Denver
Public	University of Connecticut–Storrs
Private	University of Dayton
Public	University of Delaware
Public	University of Florida
Public	University of Georgia
Public	University of Hawaii–Manoa
Public	University of Houston–University Park
Public	University of Illinois–Chicago
Public	University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign
Public	University of Iowa
Public	University of Kansas–Lawrence
Public	University of Kentucky
Public	University of Louisville
Public	University of Maryland–Baltimore County
Public	University of Maryland–College Park
Public	University of Massachusetts–Amherst
Private	University of Miami
Public	University of Michigan–Ann Arbor
Public	University of Minnesota–Twin Cities
Public	University of Missouri–Columbia
Public	University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Public	University of New Mexico–Albuquerque
Public	University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
Private	University of Notre Dame
Public	University of Oklahoma–Norman
Public	University of Oregon
Private	University of Pennsylvania
Public	University of Pittsburgh–Pittsburgh
Private	University of Rochester
Public	University of South Carolina–Columbia
Public	University of South Florida–Tampa

Private	University of Southern California
Public	University of Tennessee–Knoxville
Public	University of Texas–Austin
Public	University of Utah
Public	University of Virginia
Public	University of Washington–Seattle
Public	University of Wisconsin–Madison
Private	Vanderbilt University
Public	Virginia Commonwealth University
Public	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Private	Wake Forest University
Public	Washington State University–Pullman
Private	Washington University in St. Louis
Private	Yale University
Private	Yeshiva University

**Appendix B**  
**Survey Adaptation**

<b>Wampler, F. (2013) Survey Question</b>	<b>Researcher Survey Question</b>	<b>Topic of Question Adapted</b>
What is the definition of young alumni at your institution?	Question 4: How does your institution define young alumni? ___Years since graduation (Time since degree completion)  ___ Age (specific age derived from birthdate)  ___ Both (combination of years since graduation and age)  ___ Other	Definition of young alumni
Do you currently have a dedicated young alumni program?	Question 5: Does your institution have a dedicated young alumni program?  Yes or No	Dedicated young alumni program
How long has the program been in existence and with what success?	Question 9: How long has the young alumni program been in existence? ___less than 1 year ___1-2 years ___3-4 years ___5-6 years ___more than 6 years	Length of young alumni program
How many staff are exclusively dedicated to young alumni work and programming?	Question 8: How many staff have dedicated responsibility to the young alumni program? ___1-2 ___3-4 ___5-6 ___6-8 ___more than 8	Number of staff for young alumni program
Do you have a budget for young alumni programs? If so, how much?	Question 10: Does the young alumni program have a dedicated budget? Yes or No  If yes, please indicate the budget range ___Less than \$9,999 ___\$10,000-\$24,999 ___\$25,000-\$49,999 ___\$50,000-\$74,999 ___ more than \$75,000	Budget for young alumni program

<p>How many college- or university-sponsored young alumni events take place each year (on average)?</p>	<p>Question 26: How many events do you host in an academic year directed at young alumni?  <input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7-8  <input type="checkbox"/> More than 8</p>	<p>Number of events for young alumni</p>
<p>What type of events and programs do you offer and with what success?</p>	<p>Question 27: What type of events do you host for young alumni?  Networking  Career Development  Financial Literacy  Athletic related: Game watches/tailgates  Service Projects/Volunteering  Other _____</p>	<p>Type of events for young alumni</p>
<p>How do you measure success of your young alumni programs and outreach/engagement efforts?</p>	<p>Question 11: Do you have metrics to measure the success of the young alumni program? Yes or No   If yes, are the measurements for success based on  Alumni Participation in Event: Yes or No  Alumni Donor Participation: Yes or No  Alumni Donor Dollars: Yes or No  Alumni Volunteering/Mentoring: Yes or No</p>	<p>How success is measured</p>
<p>What is your most significant challenge in engaging your young alumni?</p>	<p>Question 13: To what extent do you believe the below are challenges to the culture of philanthropy among young alumni?   Accurate young alumni contact information  <input type="checkbox"/> not at all <input type="checkbox"/> slightly <input type="checkbox"/> moderately <input type="checkbox"/> very <input type="checkbox"/> extremely   Young alumni dissatisfaction with student experience  <input type="checkbox"/> not at all <input type="checkbox"/> slightly <input type="checkbox"/> moderately <input type="checkbox"/> very <input type="checkbox"/> extremely   Amount of young alumni student debt  <input type="checkbox"/> not at all <input type="checkbox"/> slightly <input type="checkbox"/> moderately <input type="checkbox"/> very <input type="checkbox"/> extremely   Geographical factors</p>	<p>Significant challenges in engaging young alumni</p>

	__not at all    __slightly    __moderately __very __extremely	
Do you have a student engagement and philanthropy program? If so, please offer a short description of the program and how it is tied into your young alumni program (if at all).	Question 14: Do you have a student engagement and philanthropy program? Yes or No If yes, please provide a brief description of the program and how it ties into your young alumni communication/fundraising?	Student engagement and philanthropy programs

## Appendix C

### Survey Adaptation Continued

Afolayan, L. (2012) Survey Question	Researcher Survey Question	Topic of Question Adopted
<p>What type(s) of news and information are you most interested in receiving from your alma mater?</p>	<p>Question 25: How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding:</p> <p>Engagement/Coming to Events (invitations):            ___0___1-3 times___4-6 times___7-8 times            ___More than 8 times            ___ Do not know</p> <p>Volunteering / Mentoring            ___0___1-3 times___4-6 times___7-8 times            ___More than 8 times            ___ Do not know</p> <p>Solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused):            ___0___1-3 times___4-6 times___7-8 times            ___More than 8 times            ___ Do not know</p> <p>Stewardship (thank – you’s)            ___0___1-3 times___4-6 times___7-8 times            ___More than 8 times            ___ Do not know</p> <p>Publications (updates / newsletters)            ___0___1-3 times___4-6 times___7-8 times            ___More than 8 times            ___ Do not know</p>	<p>Outreach/Communication</p>
<p>How do you prefer to receive news and information?</p>	<p>Question 28: What channels are used to communicate with young alumni regarding?            Engagement/coming to events (invitation):</p>	<p>Outreach/Communication</p>

	<p>__Direct Mail __Email__Text  __Telephone__Social Media __Personal Outreach __Other</p> <p>Volunteering/Mentoring  __Direct Mail __Email __Text  __Telephone__Social Media  __Personal Outreach __Other</p> <p>Solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused):  __Direct Mail __Email__Text  __Telephone__Social Media __Personal Outreach __Other</p> <p>Stewardship (thank you's):  __Direct Mail __Email__Text  __Telephone__Social Media  __Personal Outreach __Other</p> <p>Publications (Updates/Newsletter):  __Direct Mail __Email__Text  __Telephone __Social Media  __Personal Outreach __Other</p>	
<p>How do you prefer to send contributions to your alma mater?</p>	<p>Question 32: To what extent do young alumni pick the below channel to make a gift to your institution?</p> <p>Direct Mail  __not at all __slightly  __moderately __very  __extremely</p> <p>Email  __not at all __slightly  __moderately __very  __extremely</p> <p>Text Message  __not at all __slightly  __moderately __very  __extremely</p> <p>Telephone  __not at all __slightly  __moderately __very  __extremely</p> <p>Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)</p>	<p>Development/Fundraising</p>

	<p> <input type="checkbox"/> not at all      <input type="checkbox"/> slightly  <input type="checkbox"/> moderately      <input type="checkbox"/> very  <input type="checkbox"/> extremely </p> <p>Electronic Payment (Venmo, PayPal, CashApp, Apple Pay)</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> not at all      <input type="checkbox"/> slightly  <input type="checkbox"/> moderately      <input type="checkbox"/> very  <input type="checkbox"/> extremely </p> <p>Personal Outreach</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> not at all      <input type="checkbox"/> slightly  <input type="checkbox"/> moderately      <input type="checkbox"/> very  <input type="checkbox"/> extremely </p> <p>Crowdfunding (peer-to-peer solicitations)</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> not at all      <input type="checkbox"/> slightly  <input type="checkbox"/> moderately      <input type="checkbox"/> very  <input type="checkbox"/> extremely </p> <p>Day of Giving</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> not at all      <input type="checkbox"/> slightly  <input type="checkbox"/> moderately      <input type="checkbox"/> very  <input type="checkbox"/> extremely </p>	
<p>What is the average annual cumulative contribution?</p>	<p>Question 33: What is the average annual contribution amount of a young alumnus/a?</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> \$.01-\$4.99  <input type="checkbox"/> \$5.00-\$24.99  <input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00-\$49.99  <input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00-\$99.99  <input type="checkbox"/> \$100-\$999  <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$4,999  <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$9,999  <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$25,000  <input type="checkbox"/> more than \$25,000 </p>	<p>Development/Fundraising</p>



## **Appendix D**

### **Survey Instrument**

#### **Expectations**

The purpose of this research is to identify young alumni characteristics, programs, and donor participation at top research institutions. As one of the Top American Research Universities indicated by the Center for Measuring University Performance, your participation is requested and greatly appreciated. A total of 109 top research universities are being asked to participate in this study. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please respond with all answers to the best of your knowledge.

Your information will be automatically saved as you submit answers. Should you need to close and return to the survey, please use the same link and web browser, which will bring you to where you left off and start you at the question where you exited. **You will need to know average student debt range of graduating undergraduate students as well as average salary range of graduating undergraduate students.**

The questions will focus on 1) how young alumni are defined, and what departmental structures are in place for young alumni engagement and development, 2) what type of outreach and programming are being used to engage young alumni, and 3) how do young alumni giving participation rates differ among top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. All data received will be given an ID# and de-identified prior to analysis. A risk of your name and email being breached does exist, but all stored data will be protected behind a login and password. Every

effort will be taken to keep your responses in a de-identified format. Although there are no benefits or compensation for participating, upon satisfactory completion of all data-collection activities, you will receive a benchmarking report. In order to receive the benchmarking report, you will need to voluntarily provide your name and email address.

This research is being conducted as part of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education Doctorate Program. Please feel free to contact Sarah Webb directly at sarahwebb@pitt.edu with any questions.

By clicking the arrow below, I agree to participate in this study.

### **Demographic Information**

1. Please indicate the below personal information:
  - a. Institution Name \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Respondent's First Name \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Respondent's Last Name \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Respondent's Position/Title \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Respondent's Email \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please indicate the below institutional information:
  - a. Institution's State Affiliation  
\_\_\_ Private \_\_\_ Public
  - b. Institution's number of degree-seeking undergraduate students  
\_\_\_ fewer than 1,000 \_\_\_ 1,000-2,999 \_\_\_ 3,000-9,999 \_\_\_ at least 10,000
  - c. Average student debt amount for graduating undergraduate student  
\_\_\_ Less than \$9,999 \_\_\_ \$10,000-\$24,999 \_\_\_ \$25,000-\$49,999  
\_\_\_ \$50,000-\$74,999 \_\_\_ more than \$75,000
  - d. Average salary for graduating undergraduate student  
\_\_\_ Less than \$24,999 \_\_\_ \$25,000-\$49,999  
\_\_\_ \$50,000-\$74,999 \_\_\_ \$75,000-\$99,999 \_\_\_ more than \$99,999
3. How does your institution define young alumni?  
\_\_\_ Years since graduation (time since degree completion)  
\_\_\_ Age (specific age derived from birthdate)

- \_\_\_ Degree type (undergraduate or graduate)  
 \_\_\_ Both (combination of years since graduation and age)  
 \_\_\_ Other

4. Does your institution have a dedicated young alumni program? Yes or No  
 \*if yes, direct to program information  
 \*if no, direct to institutional information

**Programs' Structural Information—for those who answer “yes” to question 4.**

5. Do you have a branded name for your program? Yes or No  
 a. If yes, what is the name?
6. What department is responsible for executing the young alumni program?  
 \_\_\_ Alumni Association \_\_\_ Advancement / Development \_\_\_ Student Affairs  
 \_\_\_ Combination \_\_\_ Other  
 a. If combination, please provide department's name.  
 b. If other, please provide department name.
7. How many staff have dedicated responsibility to the young alumni program?  
 \_\_\_ 1-2 \_\_\_ 3-4 \_\_\_ 5-6 \_\_\_ 6-8 \_\_\_ more than 8
8. How long has the young alumni program been in existence?  
 \_\_\_ less than 1 year \_\_\_ 1-2 years \_\_\_ 3-4 years \_\_\_ 5-6 years \_\_\_ more than 6  
 years
9. Does the young alumni program have a dedicated budget? Yes or No  
 a. If yes, please indicate the budget range  
 \_\_\_ Less than \$9,999 \_\_\_ \$10,000-\$24,999 \_\_\_ \$25,000-\$49,999  
 \_\_\_ \$50,000-\$74,999 \_\_\_ more than \$75,000
10. Do you have metrics to measure the success of the young alumni program? Yes or No  
 a. If yes, Are the measurements for success based on:  
 i. Alumni Participation in Event: Yes or No  
 ii. Alumni Donor Participation: Yes or No  
 iii. Alumni Donor Dollars: Yes or No  
 iv. Alumni Volunteering / Mentoring: Yes or No
11. To what extent do you feel that you have “buy-in” from the presidential / chancellor level  
 as defined below?  
 a. Financial buy-in:

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

b. Program mission buy-in:

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

c. Other buy-in displayed by leadership \_\_\_\_\_

12. To what extent do you believe the below are challenges to the culture of philanthropy among young alumni?

a. Accurate young alumni contact information

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

b. Young alumni dissatisfaction with student experience

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

c. Amount of young alumni student debt

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

d. Geographical factors

\_\_not at all \_\_slightly \_\_moderately \_\_very \_\_extremely

13. Do you have a student engagement and philanthropy program? Yes or No

a. If yes, please provide a brief description of the program and how it ties into your young alumni communication / fundraising.

14. Does your institution have any strategic initiatives / programs intending to increase young alumni donor participation? Yes or No

a. If yes, please provide a brief description of the program and how it ties into young alumni communication / fundraising.

**Institutions' Structural Information—for those who answer “no” to question 4.**

15. Is a department responsible for young alumni engagement? Yes or No

16. Is a department responsible for young alumni fundraising? Yes or No

a. If yes to 16 and 17: Is the same department responsible for young alumni engagement and fundraising?

17. How many staff have dedicated young alumni responsibility?

\_\_0 \_\_1-2 \_\_3-4 \_\_5-6 \_\_6-8 \_\_more than 8

18. Do you have metrics to measure the success of the young alumni engagement? Yes or No

a. If yes, are the measurements for success based on

i. Alumni Participation in Event: Yes or No

ii. Alumni Volunteering / Mentoring: Yes or No

19. Do you have metrics to measure the success of young alumni fundraising? Yes or No

a. If yes, are the measurements for success based on

i. Alumni Donor Participation: Yes or No

ii. Alumni Donor Dollars: Yes or No

20. To what extent do you believe the below challenges are to the young alumni engagement and fundraising at your institution?
- Accurate young alumni contact information  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - Young alumni dissatisfaction with student experience  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - Amount of young alumni student debt  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - Geographical factors  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
21. Do you have a student engagement and philanthropy program? Yes or No
- If so, please provide a brief description of the program and how it ties into your young alumni communication / fundraising.
22. Does your institution have any strategic initiatives / programs intending to increase young alumni donor participation? Yes or No
- If so, please provide a brief description of the program and how it ties into young alumni communication / fundraising.

## Outreach

23. In total, how many times in an academic year are young alumni communicated with?  
 less than 5 times  6-10 times  11-15 times  16-20 times  More than 20 times
24. How often are young alumni communicated with in an academic year regarding:
- Engagement/Coming to Events (invitations):
- 0  1-3 times  4-6 times  7-8 times  More than 8 times
- Do not know
- Volunteering/Mentoring
- 0  1-3 times  4-6 times  7-8 times  More than 8 times
- Do not know
- Solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused):
- 0  1-3 times  4-6 times  7-8 times  More than 8 times

Do not know

Stewardship (thank you's)

0  1-3 times  4-6 times  7-8 times  More than 8 times

Do not know

Publications (updates/newsletters)

0  1-3 times  4-6 times  7-8 times  More than 8 times

Do not know

25. How many events do you host in an academic year directed at young alumni?

0  1-3  4-6  7-8  More than 8

26. What type of events do you host for young alumni?

- a. Networking
- b. Career Development
- c. Financial Literacy
- d. Donor Development Events
- e. Donor Stewardship Events
- f. Athletic-related: Game watches/tailgates
- g. Service Projects / Volunteering
- h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

27. What channels are used to communicate with young alumni regarding:  
Engagement/Coming to Events (invitation):

Direct Mail  Email  Text Message  Telephone

Social Media  Personal Outreach  Other

Volunteering/Mentoring:

Direct Mail  Email  Text Message  Telephone

Social Media  Personal Outreach  Other

Solicitations (development- or fundraising-focused):

Direct Mail  Email  Text Message  Telephone

Social Media  Personal Outreach  Other

Stewardship (thank you's):

Direct Mail  Email  Text Message  Telephone

Social Media  Personal Outreach  Other

Publications (Updates/Newsletter):

Direct Mail  Email  Text Message  Telephone

Social Media  Personal Outreach  Other

28. Are young alumni solicited for one specific area/fund identified by the institution? Yes or No

If yes, what is the specific area/fund?

### **Donor Behavior**

29. What is the percent of young alumni donor participation in fiscal year 2019 at your institution?

30. Has the percent of young alumni donor participation increased during the past five years at your institution?

31. To what extent do young alumni pick the below channel to make a gift to your institution?

a. Direct Mail

not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely

b. Email

not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely

c. Text Message

not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely

d. Telephone

not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely

e. Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)

not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely

- f. Electronic Payment (Venmo, PayPal, CashApp, Apple Pay)  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - g. Personal Outreach  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - h. Crowdfunding (peer-to-peer solicitation)  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
  - i. Day of Giving  
 not at all  slightly  moderately  very  extremely
32. What is the average annual contribution amount of a young alum?
- \$.01-\$4.99  \$5.00-\$24.99  \$25.00-\$49.99  \$50.00-\$99.99  \$100-\$999
- \$1,000-\$4,999  \$5,000-\$9,999  \$10,000-\$25,000  more than \$25,000

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Webb, the principal researcher of this project ,at 815.762.5024 or [sarahwebb@pitt.edu](mailto:sarahwebb@pitt.edu). You may also contact her faculty advisor, Linda DeAngelo, at [deangelo@pitt.edu](mailto:deangelo@pitt.edu).



## **Appendix E**

### **Email Introduction to Survey**

#### **Email from Senior Vice Chancellor of Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement Kristin**

##### **Davitt**

Dear Colleague [FIRST NAME],

I hope this email finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. I am writing on behalf of Sarah Webb, a member of my team, as she pursues her doctorate of education. We hope you will complete this survey regarding how your institution engages with young alumni. It is a very complicated time from COVID-19 but your assistance, now more than ever, will help understand young alumni engagement to sustain our role in their lives.

**I request your participation in the below survey.**

{Survey Link}

Her goal is to collect information from top research institutions such as yours to learn 1) how young alumni are defined and what departmental structures are in place for young alumni engagement and development, 2) what types of outreach and programming are being used to engage young alumni, and 3) how do young alumni giving participation rates differ among top research institutions with and without a dedicated young alumni program.

Through this study, Sarah Webb hopes to report information that will be beneficial for top research institutions. Your participation—or the participation of someone from your team—will be vital to help achieve accurate results. In order to complete the survey, information regarding institution data, young alumni outreach and communication data, young alumni fundraising efforts, and young alumni donor behavior data will need to be known.

Your information will be automatically saved as you submit answers. Should you need to close and return to the survey, please use the same link and web browser, which will bring you to where you left off and start you at the question where you exited. You will need to know average student debt range of graduating undergraduate students as well as average salary range of graduating undergraduate students.

Please feel free to contact Sarah directly at [sarahwebb@pitt.edu](mailto:sarahwebb@pitt.edu) with any questions. This research is being conducted as part of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education Doctorate Program. Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

**I request your participation in the below survey.**

{Survey Link}

Thank you for your assistance,

Kris Davitt

Senior Vice Chancellor

Division of Philanthropic and Alumni Engagement

University of Pittsburgh

Chief Development Officer, UPMC

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