Kishwaukee College Alumni: Donating Behavior to Their Alma Mater

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Over the last 20 years, there has been a significant decrease in funding for higher education. Institutions are increasingly forced to look at alternative methods for financing their college operations. One-way institutions are combatting the decrease in funding is through increased fundraising efforts. Fundraising by colleges and universities has become a mission critical fiscal need, especially for those institutions that are publicly funded. In general, charitable giving to institutions of higher education has been on the rise, with foundation support being one of the largest entities, followed by alumni giving. Community colleges are relatively new to the fundraising arena compared to their four-year counterparts and thus are significantly trailing in their alumni solicitation efforts. With alumni giving accounting for one quarter of all charitable giving to institutions of higher education, alumni are a key component in a successful fundraising strategy.

This study examined the relationship between degree attainment and alumni giving at a rural community college in Northern Illinois. The community college studied is regionally co-located with a four-year state university, with which a significant number of alumni are shared. The study hypothesized that community college alumni would align their donating behavior with the institution for which their highest degree was awarded. Thus, the community college alumni...
who transferred on to the local four-year institution would align their donating behavior with the university, essentially diminishing the community college foundation’s ability solicit funds from those alumni. The study found the opposite effect; the community college alumni with a bachelor’s degree from the local four-year state university were more likely to give than the community college alumni without a bachelor degree from there. In addition, alumni who graduated from a local high school were more likely to give than alumni from an out of district high school.
KISHWAUKEE COLLEGE ALUMNI: DONATING BEHAVIOR TO THEIR ALMA MATER

BY

KAYTE MARIE HAMEL
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Dr. Carrie Kortegast
When I first considered working towards my doctoral degree, I was unsure if I would be able to complete it with the multiple demands on my time with work and home life. I owe the completion of my degree to the support of my wonderful husband, my patient children, and my extended family. Thank you all for your enduring love and support. All the late nights, missed activities, and limited time has come to an end. Looking forward to just living life with you to the fullest.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, there has been a significant decrease in funding for higher education. According to Skari (2014), “Higher education is facing increasing fiscal challenges as federal and state agencies cut college and university budgets” (p. 23). Institutions are increasingly forced to look at alternative methods for financing their college operations. One-way institutions are combatting the decrease in funding is through increased fundraising efforts.

Fundraising by colleges and universities has become a mission critical fiscal need for all institutions of higher education, especially those that are publicly funded (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2019; Kaufman, 2004). In 2017, charitable giving to institutions of higher education increased 6.3% over the previous year, to $43.6 billion, which was the highest year on record (Council for Aid to Education, 2018). Private foundation support was the largest contributor to institutions at 30.1% followed by alumni giving at 26.1% (Council for Aid to Education, 2018). For community colleges, alumni are one of the most underutilized revenue resources when it comes to foundation fundraising (Herbin, Dittman, Herbert, & Ebben, 2006). With alumni giving accounting for one quarter of all charitable giving to institutions of higher education, alumni are a key component in a successful fundraising strategy.
An assumption within higher education is that community college alumni who transfer to a four-year institution and obtain a degree align themselves as an alumnus with their four-year institution. Skari (2014) found:

Compared with alumni without a degree, community college alumni who hold a bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education attainment are 2.4 times more likely not to give to their community college. Yet, community college alumni obtaining an associate’s degree, either as the highest degree or one of many, are 1.9 times more likely to give to their 2-year college alma mater. (p. 37)

Thus, any donations community college alumni would make to institutions of higher education would be made to the institution where the final, and highest degree, was received.

Community colleges are often seen as a stopping point along an individual’s educational journey. Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) stated, “community colleges have always been defined to some extent by their associations with the institutions on either end of their curricular offerings” (p. 30). If community college fundraising professionals accept the idea that community colleges are just a stopping point along the way to a four-year degree, it would significantly impact their fundraising efforts. In the United States, the vast majority of degrees awarded are at the associate’s and bachelor’s degree level, with 28% of bachelor’s degree students starting at community colleges (Mastroieni, A, 2013; Cataldi et al., 2011). If the 28% of community college alumni who attended four-year institutions aligned their giving behaviors with their four-year university alma mater, that could have a significant impact on community college fundraising.
Purpose

To better understand the giving habits of community college alumni, this study sought further information on alumni giving behaviors from a mid-western, rural, community college. The community college in this study is located within close proximity to a state four-year university, and the two institutions have a large number of shared alumni. The purpose of this correlational study was to understand the donating behaviors of alumni from Kishwaukee College, a two-year community college in rural Illinois, using social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By understanding the donating behaviors of alumni, community college fundraising professionals will be better able to develop strategies targeted at alumni with the intent of increasing donations. The following section will discuss the literature related to community college fundraising, reasons people give, alumni giving behaviors, and the theoretical framework. The literature review is followed by an outline of the research design and significance of the study.

Literature Review

Alumni is a term that can mean different things for different types of higher education institutions, and institutions categorize who is an alumnus of the institution in different ways. A broad definition of a community college alumnus is “someone who attended the college and benefitted from its services” (Boyd, 2009, p. 99). Bachelor’s degree granting institutions often use a narrower definition of an alumnus as someone who graduated with a degree from an institution of higher education (Drezner, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the term alumni was defined as someone who graduated from Kishwaukee College and received an associate’s...
degree, and whether they transferred to Northern Illinois University and received a bachelor’s degree. The students studied will be considered alumni from both institutions based on Drezner’s more narrow definition of an alumni. The following section will review the importance of community college fundraising, reasons people give, and alumni giving behaviors.

Community College Fundraising

Fundraising has become increasingly critical to institutions of higher education due to the overall reduction in state and federal support in higher education. According to Glass and Jackson (1998), “In today’s community college, fundraising is not an option; it is a necessity, vital to the current life and future of the college” (p. 586). Establishing foundations to coordinate fundraising has become an effective way for institutions to organize these efforts. Institutions, including community colleges, have found that creating a foundation allows for the centralization of and “vehicles for receiving funds from alumni, other donors, and philanthropic agencies” (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 170). Foundations have the ability to actively seek out donors, by soliciting businesses, community members, and alumni. Moreover, “community colleges have tried to increase fundraising from other sources, such as private donations and endowments” (Phillippe & Eblinger, 1998, p. 4). The need for foundations to expand their donor solicitation pool, beyond stakeholders with a relationship to the college for which they support, is an ever-growing trend.

The financial contributions foundations provide to colleges allows for the opportunity to expand programs, support students by creating scholarships, and develop innovative projects that the college’s current budget is not able to fund. This financial support “allow[s] community
colleges to fund programs and services that could help the institutions serve more students” in addition to “provid[ing] assistance for unfunded projects that support community colleges’ missions” (Carter, 2010, p. 100). In the era of decreased state funding and declining revenue, and without private financial support from foundations, community colleges would most likely remain stagnant or have a decline in the services and programs that they can provide. The ability for foundations to fundraise to support new initiatives is critical to the health and longevity of an institution.

Community college fundraising efforts have significantly trailed behind those of four-year institutions (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). Community colleges are newer to the realm of fundraising, while four-year institutions have more established practices and strategies. According to Drummer and Marshburn (2014), “two-year institutions are late making the investment in fundraising that four-year colleges and universities started decades ago” (p. 78). This can be seen in the significant gap in funds raised between the two types of higher education institutions. According to the Century Foundation Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal (2013), “In 2007, public community colleges derived just $372 per full time equivalent student from private and affiliated gifts, grants, contracts, investment returns, and endowment income. By contrast, private bachelor’s institutions derived $20,035 per pupil from such sources” (p. 26). The dollars community college foundations have been able to raise per student enrollment dramatically trails behind four-year institutions.
However, the opportunity for donors to have their donation make an impact is greater at a community college as their donation tends to go further than at a four-year institution. According to Romano, Palmer, Alfred, and Sydow (2016):

Community colleges might be able to use their newcomer status in the world of fundraising to their advantage, because a gift, particularly from a local donor, that might be considered small and relatively insignificant at four-year colleges would most likely be seen as highly significant and impactful at the local community college. The “power of giving local” could be very appealing to potential donors. (p. 161)

Community college foundations can benefit from leveraging the impact of a donor’s donation on their institution, compared to the same donation made to a four-year institution. The ability to do so may lie in the foundation’s ability to get at the heart of why the donor gives.

Why People Give

What motivates donors to give to organizations varies widely. According to Bekkers and Wiepking (2010), there are eight mechanisms that drive charitable giving. These mechanisms are:

a. Awareness of need – people have to be aware of need in order for support to be given.
b. Solicitation – the mere act of being solicited; how is a donor asked.
c. Costs and benefits – how much does the solicitation cost to make, compared to the amount given and the benefit the donor perceives.
d. Altruism – people give because they care about the organization’s mission and outcomes.
e. Reputation – the personal public gain for giving, or the shame for not giving; the social benefits.
f. Psychological benefits – the emotional, self-benefit, of donations; the ‘joy of giving.’
g. Values – the value the donor places on the impact the organization makes to the world.
h. Efficacy – the idea that a donation makes an impact to the organization. (p. 7)
The eight mechanism are not mutually exclusive. This means multiple mechanisms can contribute to a donor’s reason to give. There is no one strategy, or motivation, that fits all in philanthropy, thus, fundraising professionals often need to adapt their strategies to their audiences. Building relationships with donors would help fundraising professionals tailor their efforts to individual donor interests.

For community colleges, and other institutions of higher education, alumni are a large donor audience. Understanding what drives alumni to give aids in the success of individual solicitations and may differ from one alumni stakeholder to another. According to Pastorella (2003):

Many community college students had a life-altering experience at the college or were offered access to education when no other access was available. Those who achieve success often will reflect on the community college’s importance in shaping their lives, and their resulting gratitude will stimulate support. (p. 75)

Alumni who had positive experiences with their alma mater may be more likely to give. Bekkers and Wiepking (2010) conducted an extensive review of current literature on alumni giving and found that giving behaviors of alumni based on positive experiences are attributed to psychological, awareness, and solicitation mechanisms for giving.

In addition to positive experiences, incentives for giving also have an influence on donors, especially young alumni. According to McDearmon (2010), a theme that occurred in his research was the “young alumni’s insistence on receiving some sort of incentive to make donations to the university” (p. 38). Incentives often include physical tokens like university logo wear or experiences like tickets to institutional events or invites to special receptions. Study participants suggested that providing “university-related items in exchange for donations could
encourage more giving by alumni,” (p. 38). Just having a positive experience at their alma mater was not always enough for young donors to give back.

Reasons that donors and alumni do not give vary. In a study conducted by Wastyn (2009), 12 alumni, non-donors, were selected from a four-year institution and surveyed on why they chose to not donate back to their alma mater. The major themes from the study alumni cited for not giving back include, “they consider college a commodity, not a charity; they do not believe the college needs their money; they have misconceptions and uncertainties about giving; and they do not make their giving decisions logically” (p. 100). In this study, the reasons donors gave for not giving were not directly about the institution, but were more of a personal preference or belief. It was suggested that successful fundraising strategies should focus on telling the story of the impact donors can have on the institution and the need their donation will fill.

However, all of the participants in Wastyn’s (2009) study indicated that “they would likely respond to a legitimate college need that resonated with their college experience…and demonstrated how collectively they can help today’s students” (p. 105). By doing targeted campaign solicitations to alumni, such as alumni from specific programs or organizations, foundations may have more success in getting non-donor alumni to become donors as part of being targeted for fundraising efforts for that area. Donors having a direct link to the campaign supports an altruistic mechanism for giving. Knowing what moves alumni to give would hopefully increase the rate of giving by alumni to their alma maters.
Alumni Giving Behaviors

Alumni giving is one quarter of all higher education giving. The community college sector does poorly when compared to four-year institutions in soliciting support from this key group. In 2013, .08% of community college alumni donated back to their alma mater, compared to 20.4% of four-year institution alumni (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). Alumni giving at community colleges and four-year institutions are vastly different, not only in numbers, but in giving habits. The gender, marital status, age, ethnicity, degree attainment, and graduating high school of alumni were contributing factors in understanding alumni giving behaviors.

Gender

The gender of alumni impacts donating behaviors with regard to the rate and value of donations. Women tend to give at a higher rate and more frequently than their male counterparts (Dvorak & Toubman, 2013). While Lara and Johnson (2014) found that women alumnae tend to donate more often than men do, their study found no statistically significant difference. Gender has an impact on donating behaviors; while small, women tend to have more positive giving behaviors than men. In 2018, more women than men attended college (United States Census Bureau, 2018), which provides an increased opportunity to engage with women as they tend to give at a higher rate than their male counterparts.

Limited research exists on alumni donating behaviors for individuals who identify as part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queen (LGBTQ) community. Members of the community who donate to their alma maters tend to do so if they had positive experiences at the institution and if the institution is supportive of the LGBTQ community (Garvey & Drezner,
Donations from members of the LGBTQ tend to be earmarked specifically towards initiatives that support their community. Members of the LGBTQ community “often have unique financial circumstances, making them attractive candidates for giving financially” (p. 79). Further research on this group will be needed in the future to obtain a better understanding of their giving behaviors.

Marital Status

Single women are more likely to donate than single men (Mesch, Rooney, Steinberg, & Denton, 2006; Rooney, Mesch, Chin, & Steinberg, 2005; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). Women tend to donate more often, but they do not donate as much as men do (De Wit & Bekkers, 2016). According to Mesch et al. (2006), “Married men are 6% more likely to be donors than single men, and married women are 11% to 12% more likely to be donors than single men” (p. 576). Married individuals give at a higher rate than singles, despite the gender.

Donating behaviors of married couples are hard to define as most research focuses on households and the individual participating in the research. Wiepking and Bekkers (2012) found “like gender, marriage is often only included as a control variable, and therefore does not feature in the discussion of results of studies whose main interest is other determinants of giving” (p. 224). Within the limited research available, it is consistent that in a household with a married couple, one spouse typically controls the charitable giving. Andreoni, Brown, and Rischall (2003) found that within married couples, education attainment has an impact on decision making:

The greater the husband’s education relative to the wife’s, the greater the likelihood that the husband or the couple is the decider, although couples with higher average levels of
education are more likely to make joint decisions. This is consistent with the view that education is linked to bargaining power, and decision-making is a utility-providing privilege. It could also be true, however, that more educated spouses are more skilled at evaluating worthy charities (p. 127).

With individual household charitable giving decisions made in a variety of ways, alumni donation appeals need to be universal and resonate with not only the alumni, but their spouses as well (Wastyn, 2009). Understanding how gender and marital status impact donating behaviors will provide fundraising professionals with knowledge to develop more targeted strategies.

**Age**

The age of alumni has been linked to donating behaviors. Older alumni tend to give more consistently compared to younger alumni. According to Skari (2014):

> Compared with community college alumni under the age of 30, those who are 50-59 years are 2.7 times more likely to give to their 2-year alma mater, while those who are 60-69 years are 3.4 times more likely to give to their 2-year alma mater. (p. 36)

Alumni donations tend to level off as individuals approach retirement age (Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994; Olson, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989). Recent alumni tend to give at a lower rate and at a lower amount after post-graduation. Historically, as the alumni ages, the rate and amount an alumnus gives increases until alumni reach retirement age. Giving rates tend to decline after retirement which might be a consequence of lower income (Bristol, 1990). Previous research highlights that age does have an impact on alumni giving. While young alumni tend to give at a lower rate, the rate grows until the alumni reaches retirement age where it plateaus, and will then often decrease.
Ethnicity

A person’s ethnic background has shown to have an impact, though small, on alumni donating behaviors. Limited research has been conducted on this specific demographic variable. However, in a study by Sun, Hoffman, and Grady (2007), ethnicity was found to be more predictive of alumni giving behavior than degree type. In a separate study conducted by Borden, Shaker, and Kienker (2013), Hispanic/Latino and other racial groups were not statistically significant in their giving differences compared with whites, however African Americans were less likely to donate when compared to whites.

Graduating High School

Research has found that community college alumni who live within the college’s service area are more likely to give (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). A benefit of attending a community college is the low tuition rate due to community colleges as a local tax beneficiary and the philosophy that local residents should benefit from the tax recipients (Waller, 2010). Students graduating from out-of-district high schools must re-locate to the district in order to receive the lower tuition rate. Limited research has been conducted on the relationship between in-district high school, community college alumni, and donating behaviors.

Degree Attainment

The type of degree an alumnus receives has been connected with giving behaviors. Alumni who received an associate’s degree from a community college tend to give at significantly lower rates than individuals who attended four-year institutions (Skari, 2014). There
are several reasons that may contribute to the differences in giving behaviors between these two groups. One reason may be the lack of fundraising experience community colleges have compared to four-year institutions. Many community colleges have not established programs directed at building relationships with their alumni (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). Being relatively new to the fundraising arena, community colleges do not have as much experience in fundraising compared to four-year institutions. This results in community college alumni not being asked to give to their alma mater as often as bachelor degreed alumni.

In addition, alumni at community colleges can take many forms; not all students receive a degree. According to Skari (2014), “community college alumni who graduate with an associate’s degree are more likely to give than community college alumni who did not receive a 2-year degree, even if they transferred,” (p. 37). Many community college students transfer to a four-year institution without completing a two-year degree. Degree completion has an impact on alumni charitable giving; therefore, it is important for fundraising professionals to support student completion within their institution.

A vast majority of community college students transfer to four-year institutions without obtaining a degree. According to Shapiro et al. (2018), in a cohort of students from fall 2011 consisting of 1.5 million students from two-year institutions, only 5.6% transferred on to a four-year institution after obtaining a certificate or a degree. Student enrollment goals vary, and not all students have the goal to get a degree, therefore the lack of degree attainment and completion prior to transferring could have a significant impact on alumni giving at community colleges.
Alumni who do transfer after obtaining an associate’s degree and then earn a bachelor’s degree tend to align their giving with the institution from which they received their highest degree. According to Skari (2014):

Community college alumni who hold a bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education attainment are 2.4 times more likely not to give to their community college. Yet, community college alumni obtaining an associate’s degree either as their highest degree or one of many, are 1.9 times more likely to give to their 2-year college alma mater (p. 37).

Alumni are less likely to donate to their community college when they have earned a bachelor’s degree in addition to their associate’s degree. However, if an alumnus donated to their four-year alma mater, there was an increased likelihood that they would give to their community college (Skari, 2014).

Universities have had decades of experience soliciting donations from alumni. According to Skari (2014), for community colleges, “The success of alumni giving at 4-year institutions illustrates the potential that exists in generating private gifts from former students” (p. 24). The success of university foundations can be seen in the size of their endowments and it gives hope to community college foundations developing their own fundraising programs.

Theoretical Framework

After reviewing the current literature on community college fundraising, reasons people give, and alumni giving behaviors, the theoretical framework that guided this research study was social identity theory (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social identity theory is:

The basic idea is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category—a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept. (p. 259)
Graduates from Kishwaukee College would identify themselves as alumni and thus feel a sense of belonging. However, a person’s self-identity changes with their life experiences. According to Stets and Burke (2000), “Different identities become active as the situation changes and as relevant stimuli for self-categorization changes” (p. 231). Alumni from two-year colleges who transfer to four-year institutions may find their social identity changes to align with the four-year institution. The new alignment would have significant impact on an alumni’s social identity and then possibly the community college fundraising initiatives.

Individuals who identify with an organization are more likely to give financially to said organization. In a study conducted by Tidwell (2005) utilizing the social identity theory, “The results confirmed that those high in organizational identification are more likely to engage in volunteerism and contribute financially to their nonprofit” (p. 459). Alumni whose alma maters are an important aspect of their self-identity would, according to this study, be more likely to contribute to their alma maters.

**Research Design**

The study utilized a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between degree attainment and alumni giving. Quantitative research involves the use of collecting numeric values from preset data and responses. According to Creswell (2015), in quantitative studies, researchers “are interested in determining whether one or more variables might influence another variable” (p. 13). As this study sought to establish the relationship between degree attainment and giving behaviors, a quantitative approach was the most appropriate.
This study utilized a correlational design. Correlational design seeks to measure the relationship between two variables (Creswell, 2015). The study looked at degree attainment and giving behaviors to establish if there was a relationship between the two variables. The design method was explanatory. In explanatory design research, “the researcher is interested in the extent to which two variables (or more) covary, that is, where changes in one variable are reflected in changes in the other,” (Creswell, 2015, p. 341). This study looked at how degree attainment, the level and type, impacted alumni donating behaviors to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. The study looked at an intact group of alumni from Kishwaukee College and shared alumni with Northern Illinois University as a second group. All alumni who fit into the criteria were included in the research study.

**Research Questions**

There were four research questions the study sought to answer:

RQ1-What is the relationship between associate degree type and alumni donating behavior to the community college foundation?

RQ2-Does gender impact donating behaviors to the community college foundation?

RQ3-Does age impact donating behaviors to the community college foundation?

RQ4-What is the relationship between a Northern Illinois University bachelor’s degree and alumni donating behavior to the community college foundation?
Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois University are geographically located within seven miles of one another in rural Northern Illinois. Both institutions offer higher education opportunities to not only the local communities but the region. Kishwaukee College provides two-year associate degrees and certificates, while Northern Illinois University provides bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Northern Illinois University is the number one transfer institution for associate degree graduates from Kishwaukee College, with 51% of graduate transfers from the 2018 academic year (Summer 2017, Fall 2017, and Spring 2018), transferring to Northern Illinois University (Kishwaukee College, 2019).

Supporting the mission of Kishwaukee College with private donations is the Kishwaukee College Foundation. The Kishwaukee College Foundation was founded in 1971, three years after the College was established. The mission of the Foundation is to provide financial support to the College, through scholarship, program enhancement support, and special fundraising initiatives. The Kishwaukee College Foundation is able to fulfill its mission through an array of fundraising activities, including donor solicitation.

Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois University are located in DeKalb County, Illinois, with a population of 104,733 within 631 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The two schools are the only institutions of higher education in the county. According to Jenkins and Glass (1999), foundation success depends on “being the only institution of higher education in a small-town environment” (p. 607). Having two institutions of higher education within the same community may have an impact on giving for either institution. The geographic co-location of the two institutions is a primary factor in the hypothesis and research questions of this study.
Data Source and Sample

This study used secondary data from the Kishwaukee College Office of Institutional Research and the National Student Clearinghouse. An original data file was obtained and had no missing data. The data file included factual information, including general demographic information, along with degree attainment from Kishwaukee College. The National Student Clearinghouse was used to obtain degree attainment for Northern Illinois University. Bachelor’s degree attainment at Northern Illinois University will include graduates from 1985 through June 2018.

The data file was crossed referenced with the Kishwaukee College Foundation donor database. Final data fields included general demographic information, degree attainments, and a dichotomous variable representing donating behavior. Data fields are outlined in Table 1.1. Prior to collecting data, discussions were conducted with the Office of Institutional Research at Kishwaukee College to ensure the appropriate data fields were being requested to answer the research questions.

The data request required the data shared to be in an excel document to allow for future analysis. The original instrument for collecting the data existed through already established data collection points in the Office of Institutional Research and simply required a request of the information with the specific data points as outlined. Once the file was obtained, the list of alumni was crossed reference with the Kishwaukee College Foundation donor database, DonorPerfect. The system the Kishwaukee College Foundation uses for tracking donor behaviors is a separate system that the Office of Institutional Research does not have access to. Donor confidentiality was upheld as the names of alumni and donors were not used in the final research.
analysis; names were only used for matching of degree attainment and donating confirmation within the donor software.

The population studied was associate degree alumni from Kishwaukee College. The sample included all alumni who graduated between 1985 and 2004. The years for the study were chosen to provide a large enough time period for associate degree alumni to obtain a bachelor’s degree and to have a large sample size. Sampling method was a total population sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, whereby an entire population that meets a specified criterion was included in the study (Etikan, 2016). All associate degree Kishwaukee College graduates between 1985 and 2004 were included in the data file. Bachelor degree earned from NIU was 1985-2018 to allow time for associate degreeed alumni to complete their degree.

The large sample size was critical due to cross referencing the alumni with donors at Kishwaukee College and alumni at Northern Illinois University. As donor identification was cross referenced, it was anticipated that the sample pool would decrease, thus having a large pool to begin with was critical to obtaining a large enough data sample for analysis. The data sample only included alumni for whom their first degree was awarded at both institutions, if multiple degrees were obtained.

Variables

The dependent variable for the study was donating behavior to the Kishwaukee College Foundation between 2009 and 2018 and was classified as a dichotomous variable. Two independent variables were present in the study: degree type from Kishwaukee College and degree attainment from NIU. The independent variable is the item being manipulated, while the
dependent is the variable that is observed to assess the effect of the variable (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014). A bachelor degree from NIU was the only four-year institution included in the study due to the close proximity of the university to the community college. Alumni fundraising is dependent on being the only institution of higher education within a geographic area.

Based on previous research, control variables were selected and used to see if there was a difference among key demographic variables and donating behaviors. A control variable is an “attribute or characteristic that ‘stands between’ the independent and dependent variables and exercises an influence on the dependent variable apart from the independent variable” (Creswell, 2015, p. 117). Control variables in the study included gender, ethnicity, age, and graduating high school (see Table 1.1). Demographics variables, such as age, race, and gender, are often used as control variables to determine if they have an influence on the dependent variable, but they are not necessarily considered the cause (Bollen & Bauldry, 2011). Gender, ethnicity, and age were used to determine if there is a difference in donating behaviors between these demographic variables.

**Data Analysis**

In this correlational study, descriptive statistics were calculated from degree type and donating behavior. According to Gravetter and Wallnau (2014), “Descriptive statistics are techniques that take raw scores and organize or summarize them in a form that is more manageable” (p. 8). Metrics used to measure degree type attainment were Kishwaukee College Degree Only and Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois University Degree. Dichotomous donating behaviors were assessed between 2009 and 2018, with either a yes or no value for a
donation made during the 10-year period. The frequency of donations and the value of the
donation was not considered in the study.

Table 1.1 Characteristics of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving Behavior</td>
<td>Did Not Give = 0, Gave to KC Foundation = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree type from Kishwaukee College</td>
<td>Associate in Applied Science = 0, Associate in Arts = 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate in Engineering Science = 2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate in Fine Arts = 3, Associate in Science = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Degree</td>
<td>No = 0, Yes = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male = 0, Female = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1979-1988 (31-40) = 0, 1964-1978 (41-55) = 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1954-1963 (56-65) = 2, 1953 and before (66+) = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White = 0, Asian = 1, Black or African American = 2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino =3, Two or More Races = 4,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown = 5, American Indian = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating High School</td>
<td>Out of District or Other = 0, In-District = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test for independence was used to test the relationship between degree
attainment and donating behaviors. In the chi-square test for independence, “each individual in
the sample is classified on both of the two variables, creating a two-dimensional frequency-
distribution matrix” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014, p. 522). The dependent and independent
variables are categorical variables. The dependent variable, giving behavior to Kishwaukee
College, is binary with a yes or no response.

Logistic regression analysis was then used to assess the relationship between the control
variables and giving behaviors in order to predict the likelihood of giving to the Kishwaukee
College Foundation. The influence of each covariate on giving behaviors was measured. By doing regression analysis, the degree of influence of the various control variables on giving behaviors was determined.

**Validity and Limitations**

Internal validity looked at threats to the researcher’s ability to draw conclusions from data collected on the sample population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Threats may include length of time between degree completion and donating behavior, alumni from early years have a longer opportunity to give. External validity threats may include if the researcher generalizes about alumni or institutions that were not part of the study. Validity, internal and external, are limitations in the study.

There are several additional anticipated limitations to the study. Internal and external validity are anticipated limitations. Accuracy of data within donor software is the primary limitation. According to Herbin, Dittman, Herbert, and Ebben (2006), “community college alumni for the most part are ‘missing in action’ and unaccounted for” (p. 8). Alumni contacts and the identification of them may not be identified in the donor database. There may be additional alumni in the sample that will not be included due to lack of data integrity. In addition, foundations may not have captured name changes for alumni who may have been married or changed their name since graduation.

Another limitation to the study is level of degree attainment. The study only looked at associate and bachelor degree alumni from Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois
University. Alumni may have obtained a higher degree or bachelor degree elsewhere, which could impact their donating behaviors.

Only monetary donations were considered in the study. In-kind donations such as goods or services were not considered as alumni giving for the purposes of this study. A final limitation is social class. Social class of students at the time of degree attainment was not considered.

Research Significance

Community college fundraising is relatively new compared to fundraising at four-year institutions (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). Few studies have been conducted on donating behaviors of alumni at community colleges and compared to studies of alumni donating behaviors at universities. In addition, there is limited research on donating behaviors of alumni between partner institutions, such as Kishwaukee College and Northern Illinois University, with shared alumni within a specific region. The researcher is hopeful that the study findings will offer insight into the giving behaviors of the population and provide recommendations for developing a more targeted fundraising strategy for the Kishwaukee College Foundation aimed at growing alumni donations.

Conclusion

Fundraising is critical to all institutions of higher education, especially with the recent decline in state and federal support. Community colleges can reduce the impact to their institution by increasing their foundation fundraising levels. A key strategy in doing so is
increasing efforts to target alumni for donations, taking note of the success four-year institutions have had in this area.

Kishwaukee College is in a unique location whereby a four-year partner institution is located within very close proximity. As the largest transfer partner, the two colleges share alumni within the same community. Understanding the differences in donating behaviors among alumni between two-year and four-year institutions in the same geographic area can provide valuable insight and promising practices for similarly situated institutions across the country.
CHAPTER 2

DEGREE ATTAINMENT AND DONATING BEHAVIORS: A LOOK AT TWENTY YEARS OF ALUMNI DONATING TO THEIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALMA MATER

Abstract

Funding for higher education has significantly declined over the last 25 years (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). To address the shortfalls in operational budgets, institutions of higher education have turned to private organizations, such as foundations, for financial support. A key strategy for successful college foundation fundraising is soliciting donations from alumni. Community colleges are relatively new to the fundraising arena and have not had the longevity to develop effective strategies for soliciting alumni, a key group of stakeholders. This study examined twenty years of alumni from a rural community college and the relationship between degree attainment and donating behaviors to the community college foundation.

Keywords

Alumni donation behavior, alumni fundraising, alumni giving, community college foundation, community college fundraising, donating to alma mater
Introduction

Over the last 25 years, there has been a significant decrease in funding for higher education (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). Institutions are increasingly forced to look at alternative methods for financing their college operations. As Skari (2014) states, “Higher education is facing increasing fiscal challenges as federal and state agencies cut college and university budgets” (p. 23). One-way institutions are combatting the decrease in funding is through increased fundraising efforts.

In the United States, 28% of students who obtain a bachelor’s degree started their higher education journey at a community college (Mastroieni, 2013; Cataldi et al., 2011). However, students that start at community college and earn a bachelor’s degree do not necessarily translate to giving to their community college. Skari (2014) found that alumni with a bachelor’s degree were 2.4 times more likely not to give to their community college, while alumni with only an associate’s degree were 1.9 times more likely to donate to their community college. Thus, any donations community college alumni would make to institutions of higher education would be made to the institution where the final, and highest degree, would be earned.

For most institutions of higher education, alumni are the largest individual donor base, representing a quarter of all monetary gifts to institutions of higher education (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2019). However, the community college sector does poorly when compared to four-year institutions in alumni giving rates and amounts. In 2013,
% of community college alumni donated back to their alma mater, compared to 20.4% of four-year institution alumni (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). Alumni giving at community colleges and four-year institutions are vastly different, not only in numbers, but in giving habits. One explanation for why community college alumni give at lower rates is that those who transfer to a four-year institution and obtain a degree align themselves as an alumnus with their four-year institution.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between degree attainment and alumni giving behavior of community college graduates. The research site was a rural community college located relatively close to a large state university. Because of the geographic proximity of the two institutions, the state university is the number one transfer institution for associate degree graduates. The following research questions were examined:

RQ1-What is the relationship between associate degree type and alumni donating behavior to the community college foundation?

RQ2-Does gender impact donating behaviors to the community college foundation?

RQ3-Does age impact donating behaviors to the community college foundation?

RQ4-What is the relationship between a Northern Illinois University bachelor’s degree and alumni donating behavior to the community college foundation?

As community college fundraising is relatively new compared to fundraising at four-year institutions (Jenkins & Glass, 1999), this study’s findings will add to the limited research on community college fundraising currently available.
Fundraising by colleges and universities has become a mission critical fiscal need for institutions of higher education, especially those that are publicly funded (Kaufman, 2004). In 2018, according to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2019), charitable giving to institutions of higher education increased 7.2% over the previous year, to $46.72 billion, which was the highest year on record. Foundation support was the largest contributor to institutions at 30% followed by alumni giving at 26% (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2019). For community colleges, alumni are one of the most underutilized revenue resources when it comes to foundation fundraising (Herbin, Dittman, Herbert, & Ebben, 2006). With alumni giving accounting for one quarter of all charitable giving to institutions of higher education, alumni are a key component in a successful fundraising strategy.

Establishing foundations to coordinate fundraising efforts has become an effective way for institutions to organize fundraising efforts. Institutions of higher education, including community colleges, have found that creating a foundation allows for the centralization of and “vehicles for receiving funds from alumni, other donors, and philanthropic agencies” (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 170). Foundations have the ability to actively seek out donors, by soliciting businesses, community members, and alumni. The need for foundations to expand their donor solicitation pool, beyond stakeholders with a relationship to the colleges for which they support, is an ever-growing trend.
Alumni Giving Behaviors

Alumni demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, and graduating high school have been linked with different giving behaviors. For instance, women tend to give at a higher rate and more frequently than men (Dvorak & Toubman, 2013). While Lara and Johnson (2014) found that women alumnae tend to donate more often than men do, their study found no statistically significant difference. In 2018, more women than men attended college (United States Census Bureau, 2018), which provides an increased opportunity to engage with women as they tend to give at a higher rate than men. Gender has an impact on donating behaviors, and while small, women tend to have more positive giving behaviors than men.

Similarly, the age of alumni has been linked to donating behaviors. Older alumni tend to give more consistently compared to younger alumni. For instance, Skari (2014) found that alumni between the ages of 60-69 years old were 3.4 times more likely to give to their 2-year alma mater than alumni under the age of 30. Recent alumni tend to give at a lower rate and at a lower amount after post-graduation. While young alumni tend to give at a lower rate, the rate grows until the alumni reaches retirement age where it plateaus, and will often decrease (Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994; Olson, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989). This decline after retirement might be a consequence of lower income (Bristol, 1990).

Research on the relationship between race/ethnicity and alumni behavior has been inconclusive. In a study conducted by Rooney, Mesch, Chin, and Steinberg (2005), they found that there was not a significant difference between the probability of minorities’ and whites’ donating behavior. They concluded that “racial differences in giving and volunteering tend to go away after controlling for other variables” (p. 179). However, Skari (2014) found, that due to the
minimal diversity amongst alumni donors (e.g., they are mostly white/Caucasian), it is difficult to determine if race has an impact on giving behaviors. While race/ethnicity have not been found to have a significant impact on alumni donating behaviors, it is still an important attribute to consider when trying to understand the alumni population and its donating behaviors.

Lastly, connection to the local community might influence alumni giving behavior. The mission of community colleges is to serve the communities they represent. In-district high school graduates have an identified benefit to attend their local community college. Tuition rates for out of district students are much higher than in-district (Waller, 2010). While students may attend a community college from outside their home district, community colleges often focus their recruitment within their district. In-district students tend to remain within the district post-graduation. In a study conducted by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2019), it found “70.6 percent of alumni still residing in the area” (p. 27). Connection to the geographic location of the community pre-or post-attendance might strengthen an alumnus connection to the community college and influence giving behavior.

**Degree Attainment and Giving Behaviors**

Degree attainment has been shown to have an influence on alumni donating behavior, with the limited research available suggesting that alumni align their donating behavior with the institution for which their highest degree was awarded. Alumni who received an associate’s degree from a community college tend to give at significantly lower rates than individuals who attended four-year institutions (Skari, 2014). There are several reasons that may contribute to the differences in giving behaviors between these two groups.
One of the strongest reasons may be the lack of fundraising experience community colleges have compared to four-year institutions. Many community colleges have not established programs directed at building relationships with their alumni (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). Being relatively new to the fundraising arena, community colleges do not have as much experience in fundraising. This results in community college alumni not being asked to give to their alma mater. Community colleges have not been around as long as four-year institutions, therefore their foundations have not had the longevity that their peers may have in the fundraising arena to establish effective development programs (Klingaman, 2012).

In addition, the term alumni for community colleges differs than that of many four-year institutions. Community colleges often identify their alumni as anyone who has taken a course, not necessarily someone who has graduated (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). While the broader definition increases the alumni pool, alumni who do receive an associate degree are more likely to donate to their community college than alumni who did not receive an associate degree, even if they transferred on and received a bachelors (Skari, 2014).

Community colleges are often seen as a stepping stone to a four-year bachelor degree, with many community college students transferring to a four-year institution without completing an associate’s degree. Alumni who do transfer after obtaining an associate’s degree and then earn a bachelor’s degree tend to align their giving with the institution from which they received the highest degree. Skari (2014) found that community college alumni who hold an associate’s degree are 1.9 times more likely to donate to their alma mater than alumni who earned an associate’s degree and a bachelor’s degree. However, if an alumnus donated to their four-year
alma mater, there was an increased likelihood that they would also give to their community college (Skari, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was social identity theory. Social identity theory suggests that a person’s sense of belonging, or definition of who they are, is attributed to being a part of a specific group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Applying social identity theory to community college graduates would mean they would identify themselves as alumni and thus feel a sense of belonging. Having this sense of belonging and connection to the institution might influence giving behaviors. For instance, a community college graduate that went on to receive a bachelor’s from a four-year institution might identify more with the four-year school. Thus, they might be more likely to give to that institution rather than the two-year institution.

Individuals who identify with an organization are more likely to give financially to said organization. In a study conducted by Tidwell (2005) utilizing the social identity theory, it was found that individuals who had a strong organizational identification were more likely to make financial contributions to the organization which contributed to their social identity. Alumni whose alma maters are an important aspect of their self-identity would, according to this study, be more likely to contribute to their alma maters. Thus, social identity theory could help explain alumni giving patterns of individuals who hold multiple degrees.
Method

This quantitative study examined Kishwaukee College alumni and the relationship between degree attainment and alumni giving to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. According to Creswell (2015), in quantitative studies, researchers “are interested in determining whether one or more variables might influence another variable” (p. 13). As this study seeks to establish the relationship between degree attainment and giving behaviors, a quantitative approach was the most appropriate method.

Data and Sample

The study used secondary data from the Kishwaukee College Office of Institutional Research and the National Student Clearinghouse. An original data file was obtained that included factual information, including general demographic information and degree attainment. There was no missing data in the file obtained. Demographic information focused on age, gender, ethnicity, and graduating high school. The National Student Clearinghouse was used to obtain degree attainment for NIU. The data file was then manually crossed referenced with the Kishwaukee College Foundation DonorPerfect donor database.

For the purpose of this study, an alumni will be defined as someone who graduated with a degree from an institution of higher education (Drezner, 2018). This study focused only on individuals who graduated from Kishwaukee College and received an associate’s degree. For the purpose of this study, the students studied will be considered alumni based on Drezner’s more narrow definition of an alumni.
The population studied was associate degree alumni from Kishwaukee College between 1985 and 2004. The sample was a total population sampling, inclusive of all associate degree graduates between 1985 and 2004 \((n = 7,727)\). The years for the study were chosen to provide a large enough time period for associate degree alumni to obtain a bachelor’s degree and to have a large sample size. The large sample size was critical due to cross referencing the alumni with donors to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. The study only included alumni whose first associate’s degree was from Kishwaukee College if more than one degree was obtained.

**Variables**

The dependent variable for the study was donating behavior to the Kishwaukee College Foundation between 2009 and 2018 and was classified as a dichotomous variable, which was coded as either Did Not Give or Gave to KC Foundation (see Table 2.1). Giving time period was selected based on available data, as the Foundation donor database goes back until 2007 only. Giving behavior only looked at financial contributions and did not include in-kind donations. The variable did not consider the number of donations, only a yes or no for a donation made during the ten-year time period.

Two independent variables were used within the study: degree type from Kishwaukee College \((n = 7,727)\) and degree attainment from NIU \((n = 2,488)\). Both independent variables were classified as nominal variables. It was hypothesized that donating behavior is linked to the type of degree awarded. The degree type variable for Kishwaukee College was coded based on the associate degrees available at Kishwaukee College during the time period selected: associate in applied science, associate in arts, associate in engineering science, associate in fine arts, or associate in science. Previous research has found that alumni who give often will direct their
financial support to the specific college or program within a university from which they graduated (McDearmon, 2010). Degree type was used to assess if there was a relationship between a specific associate degree type and donating behavior.

The second independent variable, bachelor’s degree attainment from NIU, was recorded as a dichotomous variable, with no or yes values. The sample only included students for whom their first degree was awarded at both institutions, if multiple degrees were obtained. A bachelor’s degree at NIU was the only four-year degree granting institution considered in this study because of the close geographic proximity to Kishwaukee College. Often a community college foundation’s success is dependent on being the only institution of higher education within a small community (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). It was hypothesized that dual graduates of Kishwaukee and NIU would be more likely to give to NIU as they might feel more connected to NIU based on social identity theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving Behavior</td>
<td>Did Not Give = 0, Gave to KC Foundation = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree type from Kishwaukee</td>
<td>Associate in Applied Science = 0, Associate in Arts = 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Associate in Engineering Science = 2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate in Fine Arts = 3, Associate in Science = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Degree</td>
<td>No = 0, Yes = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male = 0, Female = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1979-1988 (31-40) = 0, 1964-1978 (41-55) = 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1954-1963 (56-65) = 2, 1953 and before (66+) = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White = 0, Asian = 1, Black or African American = 2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino =3, Two or More Races= 4,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown = 5, American Indian = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating High School</td>
<td>Out of District or Other = 0, In-District = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional control variables included were gender, age, ethnicity, and graduating high school. Demographic variables, such as age, race, and gender, are often used as control variables to see if they have an influence on the dependent variable, but they are not necessarily considered the cause (Bollen & Bauldry, 2011). The graduating high school variable was dichotomous with values of out of district/other, or in-district. Alumni with a GED were included in the out of district or other category. Control variables were used to determine if there was a difference among key demographic variables and donating behavior.

Previous research findings provided support for the selection of the control variables used in the study. Skari (2014) found that alumni’s living proximity to their alma mater and age were positive predictors of giving behaviors to community colleges. Race and gender were also used in the study by Skari (2014), but were not found to be statistically significant. However, additional studies have found gender to have an impact on donating behaviors, with women giving more often, but findings were not found to be statistically significant (Lara & Johnson, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize variables into a more manageable data set. The data set looked at the frequency of the independent and control variables within the sample and compared characteristics of the population. Chi-square for independence was then calculated to test the relationship and identify significant differences between donating behavior and degree type, age,
gender, ethnicity, and graduating high school. For variables that showed a relationship, Cramer’s V was used to assess the strength. Cramer’s V is evaluated on a scale of 0-1, with 0 indicating the weakest relationship.

Finally, binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to assess the degree of influence the various variables had on donating behavior and predict future donating behaviors. Logistic regression was the best form of analysis as the method is best “suited for describing and testing hypotheses about relationships between a categorical outcome variable and one or more categorical or continuous predictor variables” (Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002, p. 4). In addition, having a dichotomous dependent variable with mutually exclusive categories, such as in this study, provides added support for using the binary logistic regression method.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that of the population, 56.1% (n = 4,337) of the alumni were female, and 43.9% were male. The population ethnicity was predominately white at 86.7%; followed by 6.8% Black/African American; 2.8% Asian; and 3.1% Hispanic/Latino. Age of the population was calculated according to birth year and the age of alumni in 2019, when the data was pulled. The age of alumni was as follows: 15.1% between the age of 31-40; 64.2% between the age of 41-55; 16.2% between the age of 56-65; and 6.4% older than 66. Of the population, 55.9% graduated from an out of district high school or completed a GED, while 44.1% graduated from one of eleven in-district high schools.

Results of the 7,727 alumni who earned an associate’s degree from Kishwaukee College between 1985 and 2004, 60 alumni (0.78%) donated to the Kishwaukee College Foundation between 2009 and 2018, while 7,667 (99.2%) did not donate. When looking at donating behavior
and degree type from Kishwaukee College, as a percentage, those with an associate in applied science and associate of science gave at almost identical percentages and higher than the three other types of degrees at 0.85% and 0.86% respectively.

An associate in arts and associate in science are considered the more recognizable transfer degrees. With 69.6% (n=5,377) of the population receiving one of the two transfer associate degrees, almost a third of the population received a bachelor’s degree from NIU at 32%. Kishwaukee College alumni with a bachelor’s degree from NIU give at a higher percent than alumni without a bachelor degree from NIU, 1.05% and 0.65% respectively. This contradicts previous research that claims community college alumni who receive a bachelor’s degree are less likely to donate to their community college alma mater.

For gender, while there were more females in the population than males, males donated to the foundation at a higher percentage when compared to females that donated at 0.83% and 0.74% respectively. This finding is counter to previous studies that found females donate more often than males, but the difference is negligible, which is consistent with previous research. Alumni between the age of 56-65, gave at the highest percentage amongst the age groups, at 1.35%, compared to 98.65% of alumni aged 56-65 who did not give. The highest percentage age group of alumni who gave is consistent with previous research that alumni donations increase with age and level off at the retirement age before declining.

With regard to ethnicity, Asian alumni donated at the highest percentage at 0.94%, followed by white and Hispanic/Latino; American Indian, Black/African American, and alumni with no ethnicity on file or had two or more races marked, did not give to the Foundation during the studied time period. In addition, within the population, 55.9% of alumni did not graduate from an in-district high school, compared to 44.1% that did. While more alumni graduated from
out of district high schools, more local alumni gave as a percentage of the population at 1.29% compared to 0.37% of out of district alumni who gave. Table 2.2 details the descriptive summary of the population, placing alumni into two categories, those that Did Not Give and those that Gave to the Kishwaukee College Foundation.

### Table 2.2. Descriptive Summary of Donations to Kishwaukee College Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Did Not Give</th>
<th>Gave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kishwaukee College Degree</td>
<td>(n = 7,727)</td>
<td>(n = 7,667)</td>
<td>(n = 60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Applied Science</td>
<td>2,340</td>
<td>99.15%</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Arts</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>99.49%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Engineering Science</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Fine Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Science</td>
<td>3,595</td>
<td>99.19%</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5,239</td>
<td>99.35%</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2,488</td>
<td>98.95%</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,390</td>
<td>99.17%</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4,337</td>
<td>99.26%</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>99.40%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-55</td>
<td>4,811</td>
<td>99.33%</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>1,258</td>
<td>98.65%</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>99.19%</td>
<td>0.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6,696</td>
<td>99.13%</td>
<td>0.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>99.06%</td>
<td>0.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>99.59%</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of District</td>
<td>4,322</td>
<td>93.38%</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-District</td>
<td>3,405</td>
<td>98.71%</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Chi-square Independence Test

Using a chi-square independence test in SPSS, the relationship between donating behaviors and key variables was evaluated. The null hypothesis was no relationship existed between donating behavior and the key variables. Significance was tested at .05 level using Pearson for the gender and age variable. For gender, it was not found that a significant relationship existed between donating behavior and gender, $X^2(1, \, n = 7,727) = .192, \, p = .661$. This is consistent with previous studies conducted on the impact of gender on donating behavior which found that gender did not have a significant impact, although females often tend to donate more than males. For the variable age, it was not found that a significant relationship existed between donating behavior and age, $X^2(3, \, n = 7,727) = 6.644, \, p = .084$.

For the variables Kishwaukee College Degree and Ethnicity, the data did not meet the required assumptions for use of the chi-square independence test using Pearson. The test assumes that all expected frequencies are greater than five (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, the Likelihood Ratio was used to test the significance between donating behavior and the variable. For Kishwaukee College Degree, it was found that there was not a significant relationship between donating behavior and Degree Type, $X^2(4, \, n = 7,727) = 2.613, \, p = .625$. For the variable, three cells had an expected count less than five, with the minimum expected count at 0.01%. For the variable ethnicity, it was not found that a significant relationship existed between donating
behavior and ethnicity, $X^2(6, n = 7,727) = 10.028, p = .484$. For the variable, seven cells (50.0%), had an expected count less than five, with the minimum expected count at 0.02%.

A relationship between graduating high school did show an observed significant relationship with donating behavior, $X^2(1, n = 7,727) = 21.014, p = .000$. However, the effect size of the relationship using Cramer’s $V (0.052)$, points to a very weak relationship.

When looking at the relationship between a degree from NIU and donating behaviors to the Kishwaukee College Foundation significance was tested at alpha $< 0.10$ using Pearson. It was found that a significant relationship existed, $X^2(1, n = 7,727) = 3.434, p = .064$. The effect of the relationship was found to be small using Phi value of .021. Phi was used as both variables were dichotomous, providing a 2 x 2 matrix. While negligible, obtaining a degree from NIU did have a positive relationship on alumni donating to the Kishwaukee College Foundation.

**Logistic Regression Analysis**

A binomial logistic regression was performed to analyze and predict the influence of degree type from Kishwaukee College, a degree from NIU, gender, age, ethnicity, and graduating high school have on alumni donating behavior to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. Binary regression was chosen as the best method to test the relationship and predict future donating behaviors due to the categorical nature of the variables (Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002). The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $X^2(16, n = 7,727) = 41.6, p = .000$. Nagelkerke’s $R^2$ suggests that the independent and control variables can be correlated with having an influence on donating behavior 6.2% of the time. Table 2.3 details the variables in the equation for the logistic regression.
The likelihood of alumni to donate to the Kishwaukee College Foundation was found to be statistically significant for variables degree from NIU, age, and graduating high school. When using odds ratio, all other variables (i.e. Kishwaukee College degree, gender, ethnicity) tested did not show significance, suggesting the variables did not have an impact on the likelihood of an alumni donating to the Kishwaukee College Foundation.

Table 2.3. Estimates of the Impact on Giving Behavior (n = 7,727)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kishwaukee College Degree</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Arts</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.182</td>
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<td>Associate in Engineering Science</td>
<td>-0.328</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.729</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Fine Arts</td>
<td>-16.779</td>
<td>13324.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate in Science</td>
<td>-15.144</td>
<td>40193</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIU Degree</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>5.263</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.967*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.612</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-55</td>
<td>-0.662</td>
<td>0.648</td>
<td>1.042</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>-0.506</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>16.356</td>
<td>10389.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12682658.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>16.939</td>
<td>10389.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22721171.41</td>
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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>0.658</td>
<td>10529.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>15.931</td>
<td>10389.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8295442.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>30091.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.771</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>12180.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating High School</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>16.176</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.357**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-21.702</td>
<td>10389.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05, **p < .001
Reference group: associate in applied Science, no NIU degree, male, age 31-40, white, and out of district high school

For Kishwaukee College alumni who have a degree from NIU, using the odds ratio, for a
one unit of increase of alumni with a degree from NIU, it was found to increase the odds of

donating to the Foundation by a factor of 1.967, compared to alumni with a Kishwaukee College
degree only. Meaning, alumni who hold an associate degree from Kishwaukee College and a
bachelor degree from NIU, are more likely to donate to the Kishwaukee College Foundation than
alumni with a Kishwaukee College degree only.

Age had a slight influence on predicting alumni donating behaviors, however, there was
no statistically significant difference between the age groups when compared to alumni aged 31 -
40. The odds ratio for one unit increase of alumni who graduate from an in-district high school
are 3.36 times more likely to donate to the Foundation than alumni who graduate from an out of
district high school.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when evaluating the results of this study. The
most significnat limitation to the study is the number of alumni donors (n=60). The small donor
numbers in the study can lead to substantial bias and limited claims can be made with 60 people.
The study only looked at associate degreed alumni from Kishwaukee College. Donors could
have obtained a certificate or other training through Kishwaukee College and were not included
in the study.

The more narrow term for alumni is a limitation to the number of alumni included
included in the study. Often, students consider themselves an alumni after having taken courses.
colleges remain divided in their approaches to defining alumni of their institutions” (p. 25). The
study only looked at associate degreeed alumni and the narrow approach may leave out donors who consider themselves alumni of the institution.

Results were limited to the data files available for the study. First and foremost was the accuracy of the data within the donor software. Community college alumni are often described as “missing in action” (Herbin, Dittman, Herbert, & Ebben, 2006, p. 8) as they are difficult to track. Tracking alumni post-graduation is an issue for foundations nationwide (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2019). There may be additional alumni donors in the sample that were not included due to lack of data integrity within the Foundation.

Several known reasons exist for the lack of data integrity. One of which is alumni name changes. The Foundations may not have accurately captured name changes for alumni donors who have changed their name since graduation. In addition, donors can be entered into the donor software as individuals or couples. In instances where a single donor is recorded, they could have a spouse, and if so, the spouse could be an alumni and therefore would not be counted in the study.

A second perceived issue with the data is the address field. Name and address fields were used to match alumni with donor information. In instances where there was a discrepancy between the name and address from the College data file and the address on record with the Kishwaukee College Foundation, a third-party online software, www.mylife.com, was consulted to aid in address verification. According to a study conducted by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2016), it is not uncommon for Foundations to use third party vendors for address verification.

The only bachelor degree granting institution considered in the study was Northern Illinois University. Alumni may have obtained a bachelor’s degree somewhere else, or even a
more advanced degree such as master’s or doctoral degree. Advanced degrees were not considered, which could impact their donating behaviors. Finally, only monetary donations were considered in the study. In-kind donations such as goods or services were not considered as alumni giving for the purposes of this study.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research on community college alumni donating behaviors, Kishwaukee College Foundation alumni donors trail in number behind four-year institutions. In 2013, .08% of community college alumni donated back to their alma mater, compared to 20.4% of four-year institution alumni (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). Within a few years, the percent of community college alumni donors grew to 0.9% (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). However, when looking at a twenty-year period of alumni, Kishwaukee College trails behind the 2016 national percent of alumni donors with only 0.78% of alumni becoming donors of the Foundation between 2009-2018. The lower than national average percentage highlights the lack of alumni engagement with the Kishwaukee College Foundation. Overall, Kishwaukee College alumni have not been found to give financially to their community college alma mater.

This study looked at the relationship between degree attainment and alumni giving. In assessing the relationship between the type of associate degree and donating behavior, it was not found to be a statistically significant relationship. Of the five associate degree types considered in this study, alumni with an associate in applied science (AAS), associate in arts (AA), and associate in science (AS) degree were the only alumni who donated to the Foundation. The AAS degree is the degree for career and technical education, whereby alumni do not typically transfer
on to earn a bachelor’s degree. The percentage of AAS alumni who donated to the Foundation was within .01% of the percentage of alumni with an AS degree, and who typically do transfer on to obtain a bachelor’s degree. In developing strategies for soliciting alumni donations, having strategies to target specific degree types would not likely yield increased donations.

Findings regarding there being no relationship between gender and donating behaviors were consistent with previous research (Lara & Johnson, 2014). While more male alumni donated to the foundation compared to females, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant. Age had a minimal impact on donating behavior. Where the age of alumni increased, so did the number of donors. The number of alumni donors started to decline at 66+ years of age. Previous research found similar findings, in that alumni donors increase with age, only to decline as at they approach retirement age (Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994; Olson, Smith, & Wunnava, 1989).

One of the most significant finding from this study is the relationship between obtaining a bachelor’s degree from NIU and alumni donating behavior. Contrary to previous research findings, obtaining a bachelor’s degree from NIU did appear to have an influence on donating behavior to the Foundation. For Kishwaukee College alumni, receiving a bachelor’s degree from NIU had a positive influence on donating behavior to the Kishwaukee College Foundation, 1.05% compared to 0.65% respectively. This finding is inconsistent with the research conducted by Skari (2014) who found that community college alumni with a bachelor’s degree were less likely to give to their community college. This could be attributed to the number of alumni who reside within the community and whether they were graduates of another four-year institution.

The high school for which alumni graduated from had an impact on donating behavior. Alumni who did not graduate from one of the eleven in-district high schools were less likely to
donate than those that did graduate from one. Of the alumni who donated, 44 out of 60 or 73% graduated from an in-district high school. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2016) found that 70.6% of community college alumni continue to reside in their community college area. The positive relationship between graduating from an in-district high school and donating behaviors could be attributed to familiar ties to the community in addition to being an alumnus of Kishwaukee College.

When reviewing findings, social identity theory can be applied to aid in interpretation and evaluation. In applying social identity theory, Kishwaukee College alumni feel a greater sense of belonging and identification upon completion of their degree. However, alumni with a bachelor’s degree from NIU were more likely to give than alumni with an associate’s degree only, which is in opposition to what was hypothesized when this study was being developed. A potential explanation for this departure exists within the graduating high school variable.

Alumni who graduate from a local high school and remain within the community not only for their associate’s degree, but their bachelor’s degree, develop an enriched identification with the area and the community. Social identity theory puts like people into groups for how they see themselves in similar ways to other group members, compared to those who do not share similar views and are on the outside (Stets & Burke, 2000). Local alumni may identify as members of the general Kishwaukee College community, not just an alumnus of Kishwaukee College or NIU, and thus could enhance their social identity and have a positive impact on their donating behaviors.
Recommendations

From the research process and results, several recommendations for practitioners can be made:

1. *Encourage degree completion.* Degree completion has an impact on alumni charitable giving; therefore, it is important for fundraising professionals to support student completion within their own institution.

2. *Focus on local alumni.* Local alumni have shown to donate at a higher rate than alumni from out of the district, in regard to the sheer number of donors. The study found that 73% of the 60 alumni donors graduated from an in-district high school. Developing a deliberate strategy to capture this important stakeholder group, would be a step in a positive direction for increasing alumni donations to the Foundation.

3. *Develop solicitation strategy for shared alumni with NIU.* NIU is the number one four-year transfer institution for Kishwaukee College. With NIU being in the same service area as Kishwaukee, having a more targeted solicitation approach for alumni who not only continue to reside within the community, but also have a bachelor’s degree from NIU, could further enhance local alumni engagement.

4. *Further research on alumni donating behaviors.* The definition of alumni used for this study was students who obtained an associate’s degree. By using a broader term for identifying alumni, additional alumni may exist within the current donor pool. In addition, looking at the value and number of donations by alumni would be beneficial in developing a comprehensive alumni strategy.
Conclusion and Implications

The significance of this study is to expand the understanding of the giving habits of community college alumni, specifically at Kishwaukee College. By looking at, and understanding, Kishwaukee College alumni and their donating behaviors to the Kishwaukee College Foundation, the Foundation can use the information to develop specific and targeted strategies for building a successful fundraising campaign. The most significant finding from this study is the lack of alumni engagement with the community college giving and more research needs to be conducted on the topic. As the findings suggest, the Foundation’s currently low alumni engagement allows for significant growth opportunities in the area of alumni fundraising.

Kishwaukee College’s close proximity to NIU has an implied impact on the Foundation’s ability to fundraise within the community, as the two institutions have a high number of shared alumni. Previous research looked at degree attainment and donating behaviors, but limited research has been conducted on specific institutions within the same geographic area. Further research should be conducted on foundation fundraising success when there are multiple education institutions within the same area. This would aid fundraising professionals in developing strategies targeted towards shared alumni. While the study found only a small relationship, it should be considered in any successful strategy the Kishwaukee College Foundation implements.

With little research conducted on alumni giving at community colleges, this study aids in enhancing the literature available in this area. The research conducted in this study further supports and emphasizes previous findings that community college alumni fundraising perils in comparison to four-year institutions. The low numbers of alumni donors found in this study
allows for significant growth opportunities. While an opportunity for significant improvement in alumni giving exists, casting a wide net of tactics may not be the most efficient and productive solution. By utilizing the findings from this study that highlight the relationship between obtaining a bachelor’s degree from a local institution and alumni graduating from an in-district high school, more narrowly focused strategies could be defined.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 3
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Private foundation fundraising has a growing importance as state funding and student enrollment declines continue to pose financial challenges for institutions of higher education. Growing a donor database to increase financial support has become mission critical for fundraising professionals. A key strategy is to grow alumni giving. Alumni solicitation is an area that provides a significant opportunity for growth in the number of donors and financial contributions for the Kishwaukee College Foundation. This study looked at the current state of alumni giving to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. Findings from the study can help guide practitioners in developing strategies for successful alumni solicitation campaigns and programs.

Goal of the Study

Kishwaukee College holds a special place in my heart. Not only have I worked at the College since 2007, I am also a local alumnus. In my tenure at the College, I have grown a deep dedication to the success of the institution and the students who entrust us with their education. Developing a long-term, and sustainable, alumni giving program based on data, was the goal of the final research study.
The State of Illinois budget impasse in 2015 hit the budgets of institutions of higher education hard, and Kishwaukee College was no exception. State funding challenges, coupled with declining enrollment, caused the College to look at alternative revenue sources. The Kishwaukee College Foundation had been providing financial support to the College since its inception in 1971, but the importance of the partnership was magnified after the impasse. Fundraising efforts and financial support to the College was heightened and initiatives to grow financial support from private donations for specific project based initiatives were implemented.

In January 2019 my position at the College expanded to include overseeing the functions of the Foundation. One of my first tasks was to benchmark key financial metrics of the Foundation with the community college districts contiguous to ours. The results of the benchmarking project showed that while the Kishwaukee Foundation was doing relatively well with our net-assets, our annual donations were not as significant as our peers.

The Board spent some time discussing the results and delving a little further into the information. One of the questions that was posed by the Board was how having NIU in our district community impacts our alumni donations. With NIU being our number one transfer institution, and within the same community, do our shared alumni align their donating allegiance with NIU, if a bachelor’s degree was received?

The goal of this study was to see if there was a relationship between degree attainment and giving to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. Previous research found that alumni tend to align their donating behavior with the institution for which their highest degree was awarded. The original intent of the study was to include donating behaviors to the NIU Foundation, in addition to the Kishwaukee College Foundation. Additional research found that successful educational foundation fundraising is dependent on being the only institution of higher education
within the area. The study sought to see if previous research findings were true for the Kishwaukee College Foundation.

Research findings from the study would help the Foundation shape their strategies and provide a research base foundation for enhanced alumni engagement. It was assumed that we did not have a clear, or effective, alumni engagement strategy based on current knowledge and donor make-up. I was hopeful that with the awareness of previous research, and results from the study, a clearer path for alumni engagement could be developed and implemented.

Process Followed

The first step in my research was to see what other literature and research was currently available on alumni giving at community colleges. Findings highlighted the limited research that has been conducted on this topic. More research exists on alumni giving at four-year institutions than community colleges, which gives hope for the opportunities that exist with alumni giving at community colleges. The current literature review provided guidance on direction and suggested variables to be considered for the study.

Once a thorough review was complete on current literature, draft research questions were developed. I then sat down with the Director of Institutional Research at Kishwaukee College to discuss initial research questions and the secondary data resources that would be available. Through the conversation with the Director of Intuitional Research, and dissertation committee chair, more focused research questions were developed.

After discussing the data available through Kishwaukee, I reached out to the NIU Foundation. In the summer of 2019 I met with members of the NIU Foundation team to share the
goals of my research and discuss the data request needed to complete the proposed study. At that time, it was assumed that the populations for the study would be between 8,000-10,000 alumni, of which approximately 50% would have transferred to NIU, based on current Kishwaukee College transfer trends. A concern the NIU Foundation team shared during our conversation was the confidentiality of their donors. While the study was not looking at the dollars of donations, or looking at individual donor information, donor names would have to be matched for proper identification. The risk for use of the data outside of the study was discussed, although personal assurances were given that it would not.

In August, an email was received from the NIU Foundation that due to the confidentiality of their donors, and the limited resources of the Foundation staff, alumni donor information was not able to be provided at that time. Upon receiving the data file from the Kishwaukee College Office of Institutional Research, a follow-up email was sent to the NIU Foundation requesting alumni donor information. The final data from Kishwaukee showed approximately 2,500 alumni transferred to NIU and received a bachelor’s degree. The smaller bachelor alumni data set would require less resources than the original estimate. Unfortunately, the second attempt at obtaining the date was unsuccessful. While the NIU Foundation data component would have provided further insight into alumni donating behavior, I was able to move forward without that variable.

Upon successful defense of research proposal, the final data set request was made to the Kishwaukee College Office of Institutional Research. The data request included not only alumni data from Kishwaukee College, but bachelor’s degree completion from NIU. Through the National Student Clearing House, bachelor degree information was received. A single data file was received in November 2019.
Alumni were then crossed referenced with the Kishwaukee College Foundation donor database, DonorPerfect. The database has 2,469 donors; the study data set included 7,727 alumni. Donors and alumni were matched according to name and address fields. In instances where there was a discrepancy between name and address on likely matches, such as multiple alumni with the same name as a donor, a third-party website, www.mylife.com, was consulted. If identification was not 100% confident, alumni were not considered in donor pool.

Foundation records do not collect birthday, social security, or additional personal identification information; the only donor identification information collected are name, address, and phone number. The cross referencing identified 60 alumni donors within DonorPerfect during the specified 10-year time period of 2009-2018. In-kind donors were consciously excluded from the study as the goal is to develop strategies for increased giving by alumni with the hopes to grow the Foundation’s financial support of the College.

Once data was received and reviewed, variables were coded as outlined in Chapter One and Chapter Two’s Table of Variable Characteristics utilizing SPSS. Descriptive statistics, chi-square, and binary logistic regression were run as part of the data analysis. The data analysis was the most challenging part of the process. Results from the data analysis were used to establish key findings and make recommendations for future practice.

Outcomes

The most significant finding from the research was the number of alumni donors the Foundation currently had during the time period of the study, 60 donors out of a population of 7,727. While the definition of alumni for this study was narrow and only included associate
degree alumni, a less than 1% response rate of the study population was found. The response rate is consistent with previous research on community college alumni donation. The low alumni donor rate supports previous assumptions that the Kishwaukee College Foundation has room for improvement with this key stakeholder group.

Additional findings suggest the type of associate degree does not have an impact on donors. Although alumni with an associate in arts or associate in science donated more in terms of the total number of donors, with 51 of the 60 donors having one of the two degrees. But overall, degree type from Kishwaukee College was not statistically significant in determining donating behavior.

Alumni that transferred on and received a bachelor degree from NIU did show to have a positive statistically significant relationship. However, the effect size of the relationship was insignificant. When predicting future donating behaviors, Kishwaukee College alumni with a degree from NIU are more likely to give than alumni without one. This finding is contrary to previous research in that alumni align their donating behavior with the institution for which their highest degree was awarded. This could be possibly be explained by the variable addressing an individual having graduated from an in-district high school but further research would need to be conducted.

Findings indicated a relationship between the graduating high school variable and donating behavior, with alumni who graduate from a local high school more likely to give financially to the Foundation. However, the effect size of the relationship points to a very weak relationship. The odds of donating to the Kishwaukee College Foundation were negatively associated with graduating high school. Alumni graduating from an out of district high school are .298 times less likely to donate to the Kishwaukee College Foundation than alumni
graduating from an in-district high school. While more alumni graduated from out of district high schools, local alumni gave more in terms of the number of donors.

When controlling for alumni who gave to the Foundation, 73% graduated from an in-district high school, and of the in-district alumni who gave, 43% had a bachelor’s degree from NIU. Significantly more donors graduated from an in-district high school than an out of district high school. This could be attributed to familiar ties to the community. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2016) found that 70.6% of alumni continue to reside in their community college area.

Demographic variables, such as gender and ethnicity, did not show to have a significant impact on donating behaviors. Findings were consistent with previous research. Age had a slight influence on predicting future alumni donating behaviors, however, there was no statistically significant difference between the age groups when compared to alumni aged 31 to 40.

Implications for Kishwaukee College

Consistent with previous research on community college alumni donating behaviors, Kishwaukee College Foundation has room for significant improvement in soliciting alumni donations. In 2013, .08% of community college alumni donated back to their alma mater, compared to 20.4% of four-year institution alumni (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). The small number of alumni who donated to the Foundation over the 10-year period highlights the lack of alumni engagement with the Kishwaukee College Foundation.
Recommendations

Taking into consideration the research procedures and findings, several recommendations for my personal practice as a fundraising professional with the Kishwaukee College Foundation can be suggested.

Review and Update Current Data

The accuracy of the donor information within the DonorPerfect was an identified limitation of the study. Conducting a thorough review of all current Foundation donor data to ensure accuracy and proper identification is recommended. The Foundation may not have accurately captured name changes for alumni who have changed their name since graduation. In addition, donors can be entered into the donor software as individuals or couples; in instances where a single donor is recorded, they could have a spouse, and if so, the spouse could be an alumni and therefore were not counted in the study. Having a clean database from which to build would be essential in establishing a proper alumni solicitation strategy.

Procure Current Alumni Listing

According to Herbin, Dittman, Herbert, and Ebben (2006), “community college alumni for the most part are ‘missing in action’ and unaccounted for” (p. 8). Tracking alumni post-graduation is an issue for foundations nationwide (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). Third-party vendors with expertise in locating individuals are available to help colleges and universities locate alumni. Utilizing a service such as Alumni Finder or even the
National Change of Address service through the US Postal Service, would be beneficial in tracking alumni movement.

Focus on Local Alumni

Local alumni have shown to donate at a higher rate than alumni from out of the district, with regard to the sheer number of donors. The study found that 73% of the 60 alumni donors graduated from an in-district high school. Industry research finds that 70.6% of community college alumni continue to reside in the area (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). Alumni who graduated from an in-district high school, attended Kishwaukee College, and continue to reside in the community, have a higher chance of donating to the Foundation. If an alumni obtained a bachelor’s degree from NIU, there is an even higher chance for them to donate. It can be assumed that the social identity of the alumni includes a connection to their community, having stayed within it post-high school. Developing a deliberate strategy to capture this important stakeholder group, would be a step in a positive direction for increasing alumni donations to the Foundation.

Develop Solicitation Strategy for Shared Alumni with NIU

NIU is the number one four-year transfer institution for Kishwaukee College. With NIU being in the same service area as Kishwaukee, having a more targeted solicitation approach for alumni who not only continue to reside within the community, but also have a bachelor’s degree from NIU, could further enhance local alumni engagement. Developing a campaign that showcases the benefits to the local community that local alumni have, and the role Kishwaukee College plays within it, may compel alumni to give.
Further Research on Alumni Donating Behaviors

The definition of alumni used for this study was students who obtained an associate’s degree. Community colleges in general are divided in defining alumni and an equally accepted broader definition includes anyone who has taken one or more courses (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2016). By using the broader term, additional alumni may exist within the current donor pool. In addition, looking at the value and number of donations by alumni would be beneficial in developing a comprehensive alumni strategy.

Reflection

Three years. Three years of endless nights, countless scholarly journals, and missed time with my family. Would I change it? Never. The rigorous coursework, thought provoking discussions, and dissertation process, have enhanced my professional knowledge and helped me to be a more educated member of my campus community.

I have always been a good student, enjoyed learning, and challenging myself. When I applied for the doctoral program at NIU three years ago it didn’t seem like the day would ever come that I would be working to complete my dissertation. Early on in the program the seed was planted on identifying a topic for a dissertation of practice. At that time my background in higher education was marketing/public relations and enrollment management, but I was starting to do more work with our Foundation.

The College hired a new president in 2016, which was at the height of the State of Illinois budget impasse. The president is the chief fundraising officer for the College, and so I originally sought for my dissertation topic to be on how the budget impasse in Illinois affected community
college foundations fundraising efforts. During the same time frame as the budget impasse, there was a significant amount of turnover within community college presidents.

I appreciated the opportunity within the program curriculum to start preliminary work on a dissertation topic; exploring what current research already existed and drafting several versions of a literature review. However, in early 2019 my role at the College expanded to include overseeing the Foundation. My interests shifted to a more practical topic that would enhance the fundraising efforts of the Foundation, instead of looking at a historical topic that had current day implications.

Going into the study I was focused on confirming the assumption that having Northern Illinois University within in close proximity to our college hurt our fundraising efforts. Our alumni would identify with NIU over Kishwaukee College, as previous research had found. It was humbling to find out that having an NIU degree would actually increase the likelihood of alumni to donate to Kishwaukee College.

Unfortunately, a piece of the original proposed study that was missing in the final project was alumni donating behavior to NIU. Including this variable would have provided a more complete picture of alumni donating behavior. As a fellow fundraising professional, I respect the NIU Foundation’s position to preserve their donor confidentiality. However, as a doctoral student, and a soon to be three-time alumnus from NIU, I was incredibly disappointed on the lack of partnership on this project. Scholarly research is important to the program, the doctoral process, and NIU as an institution of higher learning. For the Foundation to deny a request for a current student, from the very same institution for which they support, was unfortunate.

Another finding I thought would come from the study was the relationship between degree attainment and donating behaviors. I assumed that alumni with an associate in applied
science degree would have represented more alumni donors. The career and technical programs at Kishwaukee are popular with the local community, especially the programs in the agriculture and nursing areas. Both programs have been hallmarks for the College and provide skilled labor for local employers.

If a relationship between degree type would have been found, I would have delved deeper into the specific degree type and then even the discipline. Two thirds of the alumni donors had transfer degrees, so one in three had an associate in applied science degree. Of the 2,340 associate in applied science degreed alumni, nursing was the highest discipline in number of alumni with 741. Six of the associate in applied science degreed donors had a degree in nursing, the highest of all the career tech programs. Although a relationship with degree type was not found, I still feel the information from the study and the degree type will be useful in developing an alumni strategy.

The hardest part of the research study was the data analysis component. The program curriculum included a single course on quantitative research and statistical analysis utilizing SPSS, for which I received an A. I enjoy mathematical problems and pride myself on being good with numbers and data. However, I was not prepared for the level of analysis that was required to properly complete this study. Examples and resources were provided to aid in the analysis, but if I had to do this all over again, I am not sure I would choose a quantitative study. The level of analysis required was beyond the level of statistical teachings provided in the single statistics course. I wish I had taken the course towards the end of my studies so the information was more-fresh in my mind.
Conclusion

The outcomes of this study will provide useful information for the Kishwaukee College Foundation to consider as we develop strategies for alumni engagement. As the professionals before me had laid the foundation for this study, I am hopeful that I can make significant contributions and move the needle forward with alumni giving. By focusing on the local alumni and community, strategic approaches will be implemented. In a few years’ time, one can hope that I am still with the Foundation, and able to retest this study with the goal to have made a positive difference in alumni giving to the Kishwaukee College Foundation.
REFERENCES


