Introduction

There are several factors that come to mind when thinking about a college experience; maybe it is the student capability, the extra-curricular activities, residence life, or even work life. No matter the experiences and memories that are made, our collegiate involvement plays a significant role in us becoming a contributing alumnus. This raises several questions regarding alumni-focused marketing efforts.

First, why is student engagement and philanthropy so important? These students turn into potential donors. Contributing alumni create new opportunities including new buildings, scholarships, and other student and faculty resources. These are all made possible by generous donations. Second, considering 72% of our major gift donors at the University of Montevallo are over the age of 40, should colleges focus all efforts on current alumni donations? Alumni-focused campaigns have a major impact and add capacity to the annual fund. The issue that most schools are currently addressing or have previously addressed are the gaps between when seniors graduate and when they make their first gift, which raises a third question. Why not just focus all resources on young alumni to close that gap? This is because the giving relationship built as a student persists as an alumnus, meaning that a student is more likely to continue to support a cause if he or she is comfortable supporting it as a student. “Many factors have been associated with giving behaviors in alumni, which are established during their time as undergraduate or graduate students. For instance, academic and athletic alumni donors reported that engagement in campus activities; trust; satisfaction and value; and interaction with the athletic department as influential to their decision to donate. Each of these factors contributes to the relationship alumni have with their alma mater.” (Donation Intention in Current Students). From this information it is important to address the philanthropic nature of individuals while they are students.

It takes an average of 5-10 years for alumni to make their first donation to their university. “Advancement leaders have traditionally overlooked the importance of student philanthropy in bridging the gap to young alumni giving.” (Transitioning from Senior Gifts to Senior Giving). It makes sense knowing that alumni can affect the present, but by engaging
students and young alum, you can build a philanthropic nature that will build over time as may the capacity of the donor’s gift.

Realizing that cultivating student philanthropy now will potentially create contributing alumni in the future, what are the challenges small universities face when increasing student philanthropy and young alumni giving? Let’s look at it from the side of the students: what is stopping them from being philanthropic with their time and money? Studies show it is due to the demanding schedules of current students. A Georgetown study found that students are working an average of 30 hours a week; furthermore, nearly “25% of working students are simultaneously employed full-time and enrolled in college full-time.”(Rapacon). Students at the University of Montevallo know how demanding and difficult this can be, particularly at smaller universities with less class flexibility. Another pressing issue is that students usually do not have a large disposable income. “Residents of Alabama pay an annual total price of $25,220 to attend University of Montevallo on a full-time basis. This fee is comprised of $11,370 for tuition, $8,980 room and board, $1,020 for books and supplies and $670 for other fees.” Figure 1 below describes the average 2017-18 college tuition and fees for college students. Although students may have some resources available, these costs can be overwhelming. When combined with work, school, and other activities, it is hard to stay committed to charitable donations, let alone donating funds to the school itself. Some of these financial issues persist as students transition into young alumni (e.g., student loan repayment begins).

We cannot address student giving without addressing young alumni giving. What are some of the issues that have been stopping young alumni from giving? Young alumni typically have large student loan debt and small disposable income. An article describes some of the responses to young alum being questioned about their philanthropic behavior toward their
school. “Donating is something that I will do, however, I still owe thousands of dollars for my education. I will need to get some of that investment back before considering sending more money to the university.” (McDearmon). Young alums have built up a malice about their school or how they are contacted. “Interviews with alumni from the nation's top 100 universities, as defined by the U.S. News & World Report rankings, found that 8 in 10 young alumni -- those under 35 -- feel they have already given enough in tuition payments and don't see the need for further donations.” (Alumni: We’ve given enough). This is a surprising issue that needs to be addressed. Another belief by young alum is that the school does not need their money. “Nearly half say their alma mater hasn't made enough of an effort to ‘connect with them’ apart from asking for money,” according to a release. (Alumni: We’ve given enough). This is the attitude universities need to change in order to change the habits.

**Purpose**

The goals of this research are to determine how to increase student engagement and philanthropy on campus; determine if creating a philanthropic culture on campus will close the gap between graduating seniors and engaged alumni; and determine the challenges for students to give to their university. We wanted to define the factors that would directly affect students in order to implement strategies that allowing us to impact student giving and student volunteering. We also wanted to measure if our efforts would translate to young alumni giving.

In order to determine these factors, we put together a survey to send out to current University of Montevallo students. This survey covers questions about engagement as it relates to student activities, student leadership, and lack of engagement. The purpose of this survey was to find the philanthropic culture at Montevallo, determine the motivating factors for giving or not giving, and acknowledge the attitude towards giving to the university. In order for us to truly measure where the student base is in terms of philanthropic giving, we had to ask questions to determine how students currently think. Do students believe it is important to give? Do students believe in consistently giving over time? Do students even know what philanthropy is? Also, we wanted to analyze the factors that motivate students to give. From this, we can understand what it takes to receive a consistent gift from a student (and ultimately an alumni). It is not possible to motivate students to give if they do not know the importance of giving or if do not feel it is their duty to give. We want to make sure we excite students about giving; the only way to do that is to understand their current attitude. Survey results lead to some important answers that will create more opportunities for the University of Montevallo.

Based on prior research, there were certain hypotheses we expected to find. First, we believe students will give to other charities, but not the university. Since universities are not allowed to solicit students directly, there is no way universities can match the resources given to nonprofits. Therefore, we believe nonprofits have the upper hand in receiving a gift from college students. There are some personal circumstances that may lead to students donating to specific nonprofits as well. These factors could include homelessness, sickness, schools, etc.
Second, students will not know the importance of giving to the university. Because student organizations host fundraisers and other activities on campus, we did not want the survey to sound as though students are not already giving. Organizations constantly ask students for donations, time, money, and more (e.g., blood drive). The question is: how much of the money, time, or effort is being put back into the university? There is a certain belief that giving back to your university should happen once you are an older alumnus and have become financially stable, but this is not the case. Lastly, students will report mostly low income and unable to give. While students usually have demanding schedules, as determined in the research, students are either too busy or financially unable to engage in philanthropy.

Results

The survey had a total 64 responses ranging from of freshmen to graduate students; the highest percentage being sophomores with 33%. Female response was greatest with 82% and 44% coming from the College of Fine Arts. There was a balance between residents and commuters with 59% being commuters. We started the process with some questions that were related to engagement: In a typical week, how much time do you spend on extra-curricular activities, such as intramural sports, athletic practices/games, community service groups, music groups, activism and religious organizations, among others? 65% percent of respondents say they spend 0-5 hours a week doing extra-curricular activities. Also, when asked how many extra-curricular events students attend each semester, 60% of them said 0-5. We believe these two samples are directly related. Second, we asked students if they had given to a university organization in the past year. We believe this question is one of the most significant of the survey. 46% of students did not give in the past year, 51% said they did not give due to lack of money, and 31% said no one asked them to give. Based on the research, we were not surprised that half of the students did not give due to lack of money. However, it was surprising that 31% did not give because no one asked them. These individuals could be converted to philanthropic givers. Represented by the green portion in Figure 2, we see that 38% of students gave in the past year. Of the 38% that gave, only 48% said they believed in the cause, while 26% said it is their responsibility to give. It is alarming that only 48% said they believed in the cause, as philanthropy is associated with believing in the cause.

Did you give in the past year to the University or to an organization on campus?
Represented by Figure 3, we asked students how many had given to a non-university charity in the past year. Results show that 59% of students gave to a non-university charity in the past year of these, of these, 80% said they believed in the cause.

As shown in the previous statistics, only 48% believed in the cause when giving to the university compared to 80% believing in the cause for non-university giving. This shows the significant importance in having a great cause to get behind to drive philanthropic behavior. Represented by the blue portion of Figure 3, 33% of students did not give to a non-university charity in the past year. The reason for this is 50% said they did not make enough money, while 24% said no one asked them to give. This was similar to the results of giving to the University, proving students do not have money to give. How do we address the lack of funds for college students? This is discussed later in the paper.

Lastly, I asked additional questions to determine the attitudes and perceptions of students regarding philanthropic giving; 37% of students believe they benefit from philanthropy. This is alarmingly low, as many activities are funded by philanthropic giving. For example, alumni giving plays a large role in scholarship funds. On the other hand, 82% of students believe it is important to give back to the university, which conflicts with the statistic above. It seems as though students believe it is important to give yet do not understand how giving affects them. Interestingly, 32% of students said they would give to their senior gift, while 32% said they would not, leaving 36% who said they do not know if they would give. This means 36% can be converted to donors. 63% percent of students believe the University of Montevallo needs their support. This is both promising and confusing; students believe their
support is needed, but based on the response above, do not believed they benefit from philanthropy. There seems to be a disconnect in students understanding and importance of philanthropy and seeing how it benefits them directly. Lastly, when asked if they would consider giving to the university once they graduate, 37% of students said they would give in 1-5 years after graduation (figure 4). This was surprising; if students were truly donating at this rate, alumni giving and participation would skyrocket. It appears students are open giving, if asked. Similarly, there were students that were not as enthusiastic: 15% saying they would never give to the university. I believe with the right cause there can always be a change of heart.

**Recommendations**

So how can we increase student engagement and philanthropy so that it would lead young alumni into greater participation? First, get students and young alumni more comfortable with giving! There is an unspoken belief that you have to give huge gifts to make a difference on campus; student philanthropy is all about disproving this theory. A recent article encourages allowing students to get involved with non-monetary philanthropic initiatives. “There are other ways for students and young alumni to stay engaged with their university, though, short of giving money, such as helping graduates find jobs or participating in community service opportunities.” (Jillian Berman). We have to find philanthropic initiatives showing students the opportunities to give. As shown, 31% of students from this survey said they were never asked to give. Providing opportunities – like writing thank you cards volunteering – may convert these students to donors.

When comparing student philanthropy from university to nonprofit causes, 80% stated they gave because they believed in the nonprofit, when only 48% believed in the university itself. This shows more commitment and understanding for what they are giving to. By allowing students to get behind a great central cause that everyone can relate to, you can gain more loyalty from students.

Second, use student organizations to solicit donations. Universities all over have been fighting this battle with student philanthropy and young alumni giving. This has led to many student philanthropy groups, student alumni groups, and advancement groups seeking donations on behalf of the university. This trend has grown tremendously; one way is through the work of the Council for Education and Support of Education (CASE). CASE is a membership association serving educational institutions and the advancement professionals who work on their behalf such as alumni relations, communications, development, marketing and allied areas. CASE helps its members build stronger relationships with their alumni and donors, raise funds for campus projects, produce recruitment materials, market their institutions to prospective students, diversify the profession, and foster public support of education. It is their program, CASE ASAP (Affiliated Student Advancement Programs), that comprises student alumni associations, student foundations and similar organizations at more than 300 CASE
member institutions. Through this program, students and advisors can share different methods, practices, and activities used to increase student philanthropy and engagement on their campus.

There are many examples of exceptional student philanthropy groups throughout the country; below are a few that set the standards in higher education. In 2017, Berea College had 934 student donors out of 1600 students. They take a membership approach. Students have an opportunity to become a Berea patron by giving $5 to the university. If students donate $50 or more, they become a member of the Mountaineer Club, which is a giving group for students and young alumni. Also, because all students are required to work on campus, student donations can be automatically withdrawn from their paycheck. Berea College has 934 student donors.

The University of Missouri’s Mizzou Student Foundation (MSF), a volunteer organization dedicated to serving students and the Mizzou community, created Rally Mizzou campaign. During the campaign, MSF members solicit donations from their fellow students to go to scholarships for students in need. In 2016 they raised more than $18,000 for 19 students.

The student alumni association at Seton Hall recruited more than 1,000 students to sign cards for alumni, perform random acts of kindness, and thank faculty and staff who have given back to the university.

So how has the University of Montevallo played a part in the student philanthropy trend? Luckily, I have been able to play a major role in the development of the student philanthropy programs on campus. In May of 2016 I started an internship with the Office of Advancement and Alumni Affairs at the University of Montevallo. I was able to gain perspective on alumni giving and its importance. I also was able to work hands-on with different aspects of Advancement such as the asking process, the comprehensive campaign “It’s About Family”, and stewardship. I immediately found interest in what I was working with and it led me to develop a proposal called UMConnection. This program would help connect alumni through platforms such as social media and the possibility of new events. This gave me the opportunity to work with the Digital Media Specialist and Alumni Director on some introductory projects such as a video series called UMemories in which we asked faculty and staff to give their favorite memory as a student. I would also have my first encounter with the impact of CASE ASAP. The Annual Fund Director at the time attended a CASE ASAP conference and was able to bring back the idea of a STAT Program to

Figure 5

“I am donating my dollar during STAT Philanthropy Week because I know every dollar, every quarter, even every penny counts in college, and I personally have encountered the struggle of being an everyday college student. I want to pay it forward for the Falcons to come. It is important that we come together as a student body and pick each other up when one of us has fallen. By donating just one dollar, YOU can make all the difference.” – Jason Perry

#1StudentAtATime
Montevallo. The difference with this group is that we would support one major cause and that is the Student Emergency Fund and Food Pantry. I was asked to be president of this group. Through this opportunity I was able to attend a CASE ASAP conference in which I learned about the great university groups I mentioned above. With all of these ideas in mind I came back to the University of Montevallo eager to invoke change in the philanthropic culture on campus. In less than a year, we have been able to create some major university events as well as raise over $3,000. Events such as Student Day of Giving, A Trunk or Treat, and S.T.A.T. Chili Cook-Off are just a few examples of the new community engaging events we were able to implement. One way we have increased student philanthropy was through our S.T.A.T. Week. During this week we hosted events everyday such as an Easter egg hunt, a birthday party, and rendition of Cashcab featuring the President of the University. During this week, we asked that every student donate at least $1 to the emergency fund. Within our first day we raised $250 through a dunk tank where students could dunk their favorite professors. Figure 5 is an example of some of our marketing to motivate students to give. University student leaders, including myself, took pictures and submitted a message of encouragement to the student body. We were able to receive amazing support this year and I believe we truly made a difference in the philanthropic culture on campus.

**Conclusion**

Student philanthropy and engagement leads to young alumni engagement which increases overall alumni participation. Philanthropy is about persistence and we want that persistence to start as a student and continue as an alumnus. Also, it is important to thank students and young alumni for their giving efforts. Everyone wants to feel appreciated for their donation, no matter the size. The most important thing is ensuring students that the smallest of gifts matter. Showing appreciation to small gifts will lead to the alumni being comfortable giving larger gifts when able. Philanthropy is a recurring process and it starts on the first day as a student! As we try and change the culture of giving to our future alma mater, we realize it is a long process due to financial and time constraints that requires a shift in cultural thinking. Our goal is to ease freshmen into this process so they will be fully comfortable with giving by the time they are seniors. We hope this will lead to more opportunities for our students to not only gain valuable experience, but also learn philanthropic behaviors that will last a lifetime.


Student Philanthropy. Retrieved February 06, 2018, from https://www.berea.edu/studentphilanthropy/