

A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ALUMNI PERCEPTIONS
OF DIGITAL OR IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the preferred methods of communication and alumni engagement of higher education institution alumni donors in an era with increased social media and electronic communications. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, Alumni Relations Offices (AROs) were challenged with a changing world environment and new ways in which people were interacting with each other and especially their alma maters. Through a quantitative formatted questionnaire and qualitative focus groups, a Stratified Alumni Engagement Model is suggested to create a varied engagement approach for AROs.

This research is based upon the social exchange theory, the theory of planned behaviors, and the discretionary collaborative behavioral theory. Each of these theories were investigated in terms of how they relate to the alumni/university relationship. The research questions were developed based upon these theories.

Throughout the research, it was determined that there is a relationship between certain alumni demographic information and preference on in-person or virtual engagement. It was also found that alumni who are engaged with the university have a higher propensity to make a gift. Alumni or donors who identify with a higher education institution are more likely to donate and support the institution through nonfinancial means such as volunteerism. Additional findings of this research include that alumni prefer a range of communication preferences. The research also found there is a relationship between alumni engagement and alumni giving.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated first to my husband, Chris, for his support, encouragement, and guidance throughout my educational journey. Without his insistence that I continue to pursue higher education, I would not have the courage to continue with this program and research. His sacrifice for his own personal time has allowed me to work long hours while also building our beautiful family. He is the quiet strength of our family and my source of confidence.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

As governmental agencies across the United States reduce funding support for higher education, many institutions have increased efforts of advancement and development opportunities through solicitation of alumni and friends. Alumni Relations offices (AROs) are increasingly important to communicate the needs of the university as these offices have increased responsibilities of fundraising, strategy, career services, communication, and alumni and donor research (Coolman, 2011). Technology has been an incredible asset for these duties. However, for many alumni, social media has replaced the necessity for alumni groups to share information face-to-face, which has historically been the main objective for alumni relations offices (Levine, 2009).

As the duties for alumni relations offices increase and the preference in ways of communicating to alumni have changed, AROs have used technology to bridge the gap between decreased resources and increased expectations for frequency of communication. AROs are tasked with building relationships with alumni. Alumni who are engaged and knowledgeable about a university are more inclined to support the university (Wastyn, 2009). Colleges and universities must create their own narrative to illustrate why the institution is in need of financial support (Wastyn, 2009).

On March 16, 2020, the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) sent employees and students home due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Alumni engagement and stewardship events were canceled. Development officers, who raise most of the external funds for the university, were not allowed to conduct donor visits. As a result, the UTM Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving was forced to make quick changes in programming and planning. As such, it became obvious to the alumni relations staff that the key to continued communication to alumni and stakeholders during the pandemic, and even after the pandemic, is an increased technology-based engagement and communications strategy.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education AROs are tasked with facilitating a robust alumni donor pipeline. Alumni engagement is key to encouraging alumni to support the university with their time and gifts (Coolman, 2011). As new technology to communicate are available, such as social media, email, and e-newsletters, AROs are turning to technological means of communication to reach alumni (Levine, 2009). The question many AROs face is, what is the most effective way of engaging and communicating with alumni? The COVID-19 pandemic quickened many industry's digital communications tactics, including forcing AROs to make changes quickly in how they interact with alumni (Bin-Nashwan, Al-Daihani, Abdul-Jabbar, & Al-Ttaffi, 2022; Gallo, 2020). However, it is not yet known if digital processes of engagement are as effective and requested as in-person forms of engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the preferred methods of communication and alumni engagement of higher education institution alumni donors in an era with increased social media and electronic communications. While the goal of higher education advancement departments is to raise external funds for institutions, studies have shown engaged alumni are more likely to financially support the institution (Coolman, 2011; Gallo, 2019). This study focuses on how alumni of the University of Tennessee at Martin prefer to engage with the university (Coolman, 2011; Kateman, 2015). This study will assist the University of Tennessee at Martin, and potentially other higher education AROs, in deciding on the most effective engagement programming.

Research Questions

- 1) What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred formats of alumni programming, either online or in-person?
- 2) What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred types of alumni programming? Examples include speakers, volunteerism, continuing education, and career services.
- 3) What, if any, is the relationship between alumni donor status and alumni engagement?
- 4) What, if any, is the relationship between alumni engagement and preference on types of communications from the university?

- 5) What, if any, is the relationship between collegiate experience perceptions and alumni engagement?
- 6) What services do UTM alumni want the university to provide?

Rationale for the Study

The duties of AROs are no longer confined to alumni chapter and reunion events. Historically, AROs formed the first development and fundraising efforts of higher education institutions by hosting events and communicating the needs of the university in person (Dolbert, 2002). Many of these engagement events were coordinated by dedicated volunteer alumni. As fundraising initiatives were prioritized by universities, alumni staff were hired, and their salaries were paid by the funds that were raised for the university. Once university administrations began to implement fundraising initiatives of their own, development offices, communications offices, and special event offices began driving the outreach efforts instead of outside constituents (Dolbert, 2002).

Coolman (2011) stated alumni relations professionals are responsible for fundraising, career services, communications, and research. AROs are responsible for engaging alumni to transition them through the fundraising pipeline to become annual giving donors and possibly major gift donors. Alumni must “attain a disposition of readiness or motivation to give before a donation will be granted to the institution” (Hoyt, 2004, p. 1). Communication is key to gain the attention of university alumni and promote the readiness and motivation to give and be engaged with the university (Levine, 2009).

Alumni engagement is calculated through several different engagement data points (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a). The most traditional data are obtained when an

alumnus attends an event or volunteers on a college advisory board or committee (Hoyt, 2004). Other points are now calculated into alumni engagement including educational experiences, educational outcomes, fundraising solicitations, and alumni giving (Hoyt, 2004). While some of the engagement factors are outside the realm of control or effect of alumni relations, solicitations, alumni involvement, and communications for each of those initiatives are within the sphere of influence.

With the introduction of the internet, email, and social media, communication engagement with higher education alumni has drastically changed over the years. Events are no longer required to tell alumni about campus news. For example, Levine (2009) conducted a study on communication and alumni relations. Her findings concluded an increased number in electronic newsletters resulted in more donations to the college's general fund, as well as a positive correlation in donations with the periodic alumni magazine. Levine (2009) also mentioned it was difficult to tie the success of an alumni magazine to donations without having an independent study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based upon the social exchange theory (Chadwick-Jones, 1976) and two behavioral theories: the theory of planned behaviors (Ajzen, 1991) and the discretionary collaborative behavior (Heckman & Guskey, 2015). Each of these theories affects the research questions asked and will guide the literature review in determining relevant works to include within this topic. Higher education alumni relations and annual giving topics will be compared based upon each of these theories.

First, the social exchange theory is a broad theory that encompasses the disciplines of psychology and sociology and many research topics. Chadwick-Jones (1976) describes the theory:

It is not a matter of maximizing or optimizing individual gains, but of understanding the meaning of such 'gains' relative to the relationship with other people, or the realization of joint gains or gains at the expense of others; it may be a question of altruism or social responsibility. (p. 8)

In simpler words, this theory investigates the perceived gains and losses for interactions between people or organizations. A commonly known example of the social exchange theory is described in the prisoner dilemma where two criminals are given the option of confessing or not confessing. If neither confess, then they are charged with a minor crime. If both confess, they get a mild sentence. If only one confesses, the confessor is released and the other is served the maximum sentence (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). The dilemma simplifies the theory in that people weigh the risk and rewards in their interactions and behavior. However, as Chadwick-Jones (1976) mentioned, the rewards can come in the form of altruism or perceived risk in not fulfilling a social responsibility.

While the primary focus of development and alumni relations work is to raise money for the university, alumni must be engaged with the university first (Lasher & Cook, 1996). The act of engagement is described in the social exchange theory. The trade-off benefit for the alumnus versus the cost of engagement is in the forms of participating, volunteering, or donating (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The benefit for the alumnus could be in many forms including student experience, student financial aid, career services, or alumni benefits including events and programming (Kundzina & Rivza, 2020). The conceptual model created by Kundzina and Rivza (2020) posited that motivated graduates engage with the university, and in turn, they recommend

other graduates also engage with the university. While engagement certainly includes monetary donations, the proposed research focuses on volunteerism, participating in events, and consumption of alumni communication efforts including social media and alumni magazines and newsletters.

Next, the theory of planned behavior is defined as “perceived behavioral control, together with behavioral intention, can be used directly to predict behavioral achievement” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 184). In other words, and relating this theory to donating to a university, the intentions to donate money to an institution and the perceived control of behavior can help accurately predict behavior. The perceived behavioral control must be stable between the assessment and the actual behavior for accurate predictions (Ajzen, 1991). Smith and McSweeney (2007) stated,

the central premise of the theory of planned behavior is that behavioral decisions are not made spontaneously, but are the result of a reasoned process in which behavior is influenced, albeit indirectly, by attitudes, norms, and perceptions of control over the behavior. (p. 5)

Attitudes, social factors, and other norms all influence charitable giving (Smith & McSweeney, 2007). As stated earlier, higher education advancement work continues with the main goal of fundraising. In order to successfully fundraise, alumni must first be engaged with the university (Kundzina & Rivza, 2020). While there are theories that contradict this particular perspective, such as utility theory and prospect theory described by Kahneman (2011), the overall theme that engagement elicits university support is at the crux of the proposed research topic. This research topic will investigate what social factors such as events, communications, or relationships can help engage with alumni which in turn might lead to future donations.

The third theory will frame this research topic is the discretionary collaborative behavior framework. Discretionary collaborative behavior is behavior that “goes beyond what is required

by contractual or role obligations” (Heckman & Guskey, 2015, p. 108). Discretionary collaborative behavior is a subset of the more general class of helping behavior. Chou and Stauffer (2016) described three subsets of helping behavior that could all be included in discretionary collaborative behavior: unsolicited proactive helping behavior, unsolicited reactive helping behavior, and solicited reactive helping behavior. In the case of alumni relations, these behaviors are displayed by alumni or donors to a university. Heckman and Guskey (2015) posited that universities rely upon these types of behaviors for advisory board service, talking to prospective students and parents, providing employment opportunities for graduates, and being lifelong donors to the institution.

It is natural to think of service providers helping their customers, but another way to view marketing and branding is to think of how customers provide benefits to the service provider and higher education institutions (Guskey, 2010). Higher educational institutions use alumni and donors to help convey the message of the university through their personal communication. Stephenson and Bell (2014) support this by discussing how social identity affects alumni giving. Alumni or donors who identify with a higher education institution are more likely to donate and support the institution through nonfinancial means such as volunteerism. Some alumni donate or volunteer their time without being specifically asked while others donate or give their time after being solicited. Alumni relations and annual giving offices are tasked with managing the discretionary collaborate behavior of alumni and donors for the benefit and promotion of the university (Heckman & Guskey, 2015).

Importance of the Study

Higher education institutions need the support of alumni for the purposes of admissions, volunteerism, and financial support. Gallo (2019) made an important distinction for alumni

relation efforts to dispel the perception of “friend-raising” before fundraising. While this might be true from a fundraising perspective, alumni relations efforts are more than just engaging alumni for fundraising efforts. The purpose is to engage alumni for the advancement of the whole university in terms of engaging prospective students, current students for future job placements, and alumni topic experts for enhanced class curriculum to make the campus experience more robust for students, faculty, staff, and other alumni (Gallo, 2019).

Methods for communicating with UTM alumni have changed over the years to include technology such as email, social media, and, more recently, virtual live engagements with Zoom meetings. Social media has provided gateways for communication and feedback from stakeholders and created a means for organizations to showcase their own brands and reputations (Freberg, 2019). Alumni relations professionals are beginning to use the data from social media and email communications to determine which alumni want to be engaged with the university.

Definition of the Terms

Advancement – The collective term used in higher education for alumni relations, communications, development, marketing, and advancement services (CASE, 2019).

Alumnus/Alumni - The term used for a person who has graduated from an educational institution. Alumni is the plural form of alumnus (Willemain, Goyal, Van Deven, & Thukral, 1994).

Alumni Engagement - Alumni participating with university activities or communications (Alnawas & Phillips, 2015).

Alumni Engagement Activity - An activity is defined as an ongoing engagement factor that does not have a set date or time (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

Alumni Engagement Award/Honor - An award/honor is bestowed on an individual by the university or a related entity (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

Alumni Engagement Committee - A committee is defined as a group of individuals appointed by the university for a specific function (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

Alumni Engagement Event - An event is defined as a one-time occurrence hosted by the university with alumni/friend attendees (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

Alumni Engagement - Volunteer Activities – A volunteer activity occurs when an individual volunteers for service or other actions for the benefit of the university (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

COVID-19 - On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan, China. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, CO stands for corona, VI for virus, and D for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as 2019 novel coronavirus or 2019-nCoV (Center for Disease Control, 2020).

Development - Fundraising efforts at higher education institutions (Bolman & Gallos, 2011).

Engagement Factor - Data that is tracked on alumni participation including event attendance, email opens, committee participation and other activities (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a).

Friend-raising - Building relationships with university alumni and friends to sell the vision of the institution (Binkley, 2012).

Solicitations - Methods of asking someone for a gift or donation including a personal ask, mailed letter, or email asking for a donation (McDearmon, 2010).

Methodological Assumptions

The proposed research topic will be investigated in a mixed-methods approach. First, a quantitative study will be conducted through a survey distributed to UTM alumni with available email addresses. The first methodological assumption for the quantitative study is that alumni are familiar with the role of alumni relations and the general services the office provides. It is also assumed that alumni will respond to the survey honestly based upon their experiences. The next assumption is the population sample will be representative of the entire UTM alumni base. Other assumptions include that alumni are familiar with common phrases and colloquial language associated with UT Martin and that alumni are familiar with technological forms of engagement such as Zoom, social media, and electronic communication methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, it is assumed participants will be truthful with their past and present experiences.

Once the survey results have been analyzed, a qualitative research focus group will be conducted to expound on the results. Members of the UTM Alumni Council and Young Alumni Council will be asked to participate in the interview. Methodological assumptions of the qualitative research will assume members are honest and answer questions based upon their individual experience. Alumni will be asked to answer questions based solely on what they have experienced and not rely on the opinions of others.

Delimitations of the Study

This study will limit participants to undergraduate alumni of the University of Tennessee at Martin and will not include participants who only received graduate degrees from the university. The reason for this delimitation is most of the segmentation conducted for alumni programming and fundraising is based upon an alumnus's undergraduate degree. This study will limit the scope of the research and segmentation based upon alumni who have received an undergraduate degree because UT Martin's priority is undergraduate education. Next, this study will include participants who have at least one engagement factor in the alumni and donor database housed within the University of Tennessee Foundation. Finally, this study will include participants who have an active email within the database.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study are defined as those engagement opportunities that were planned, organized, or conducted by the institution's ARO. This will be limited to maintain consistency with the engagement opportunities. When asking alumni if they prefer certain types of communications, they will be asked to think of only the communications they receive from the university's ARO and not communications from other businesses or organizations. Another limitation might be a lack of participation among certain demographics of alumni due to perception of cultural bias or personal experiences related to the university. During 2020, there were many critiques of the university and the experiences of African American students and other minority groups. Other limitations of this study include the lack of generalization of the research findings to other higher education institutions. The findings might only reflect perceptions of UTM alumni.

Lastly, this research will be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants will be asked to consider the questions based on no restrictions caused by the pandemic. Now that participants are familiar with virtual meetings and events, they will be asked to select a preference regardless of restrictions. The pandemic might cause a short-term bias in answers about participants' preference of virtual or in-person events.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Since the beginning of higher education in the United States, colleges and universities have relied on voluntary financial support to bridge the gap between institutional needs and available resources (Morrill, 1938; Skinner, 2019). Tuition does not cover all university costs, and state support for public institutions has historically been on a decline (Levine, 2009). The need for student assistance is increasing. Higher education AROs are tasked with engaging alumni for the promotion of the university by advocating for financial support (Dolbert, 2002). With the rise of social media outlets and technology, AROs have diversified their focus beyond chapter and reunion events for engagement (Farrow & Yuan, 2011). Now, AROs are taking a strategic approach to engage alumni across many platforms of communication and technology. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, alumni relations were forced to use nonphysical engagement techniques for communication, including the use of technological platforms.

For public institutions, private support has been essential to close the gap between the needs of the institution and the financial resources available through tuition payments and state funding (Levine, 2009). Alumni have become a targeted audience to solicit support and involvement (Hoyt, 2004). In turn, universities have created AROs to engage alumni to

encourage the continued financial support of the institution after a person graduates (Coolman, 2011).

Morrill (1938) states that at the time of publication, alumni relations efforts were unique to the United States. Morrill (1938) wrote an article for the *Journal of Higher Education* which states:

The attitude of college presidents toward alumni, like the feeding habits of wild geese, is important to observe, for this attitude may be institutionally symptomatic. It indicates in some cases whether alumni interest and influence will be pruned back sharply, merely tolerated, or encouraged to thrive and flourish. (p. 235)

As a result of increasing alumni support in the early days of higher education, institutions began to realize the power and influence of their alumni and began to work toward methods that would cultivate alumni engagement by influential support or financial support. The background of alumni relations includes volunteer management but has evolved into proactive alumni engagement, annual giving initiatives, communications, and postgraduate services (Coolman, 2011). This literature review will focus on the importance of alumni engagement to higher education institutions and how technology has become essential in practice.

What is Alumni Engagement?

There is strength in higher education alumni (Morrill, 1938; Skinner, 2019). Universities have attempted to harness this strength for the promotion of the university's mission and for financial support where resources are lacking. Many universities have struggled with how best to engage their alumni (Kateman, 2015; Stephenson & Yerger, 2014). With government support shrinking, AROs are changing to tactics that are typically associated with the business sector (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014).

Newman and Petrosko (2011) discussed the importance of alumni programs for the university. Advancement professionals in alumni relations:

- Build life-long relationships with alumni in support of the institution
- Facilitate 2-way communication between the institution and alumni
- Leverage a powerful alumni voice on behalf of the institution
- Maintain history and traditions and help secure a bright future for the institution.

(Newman & Petrosko, 2011, p. 739)

Alumni professionals have traditionally been known as friend-raisers in contrast to higher education fundraisers, also known as development officers. Alumni relations serves to bridge the connection between graduates and the university in order to facilitate opportunities for alumni to give back with their time and/or finances (Newman & Petrosko, 2011).

In 2016, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) created an Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force focused on addressing the need for an industry standard and framework to measure alumni engagement (Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force, 2018). This task force defined alumni engagement as “activities that are valued by alumni, build enduring and mutually beneficial relationships, inspire loyalty and financial support, strengthen the institution’s reputation and involve alumni in meaningful activities to advance the institution’s mission” (Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force, 2018, p. 5). Engagement can include events, personal conversations, written communications, or any other initiative that attempts to gain the attention and recognition of alumni to their alma mater.

Alumni engagement is difficult work (Kateman, 2015). Finding engagement opportunities that are inviting and interesting to alumni can be a trial-and-error process. Especially for alumni that live outside the general region of the university, finding engagement

opportunities that do not center around athletic events or regional alumni events can make it more difficult for an alumnus to feel connected to the university (Kateman, 2015). Alumni relations staff are focusing on nontraditional ways of engagement, such as social media and e-communications, so alumni can feel connected even if their lives have taken them beyond the traditional service region of the university (Kateman, 2015).

Most of the recent literature on alumni engagement focuses on digital engagements, career services, or electronic communications (Dolbert, 2002; Fishman, 2012; Levine, 2009). However, the relevance of in-person alumni events remains to be an important piece of alumni relations in higher education. For example, Kroll, Bakerman, and Jain (2015) state that professional development events and career networking events are correlated with volunteer numbers while travel programs are correlated with donors. It was not stated whether the event was held in-person or virtually. More investigation is needed on the preferences and effectiveness of in-person events on alumni donations.

Collecting Alumni Engagement Metrics

The recording of alumni engagement is extremely important to modern efforts of alumni management. Alumni engagement scores for the University of Tennessee Foundation are calculated to predict how likely a person will continue to engage with the university. Maintaining adequate records is essential to use the resources to conduct events and communications in order to achieve the greatest return on investment as possible (Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force, 2018). The University of Tennessee Foundation, Incorporated (UTFI) collects alumni engagement data for each campus of the University of Tennessee System. Types of information collected are activities, awards and honors, committee participation, event participation, and

volunteer activities. Individual units are responsible for the importation of alumni engagement metrics. The UTFI Central Office team then uses those metrics to calculate engagement scores for each alumnus (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

The University of Tennessee Foundation, Inc. uses Advance - Alumni and Donor Information (ANDI) by Ellucian, which is an alumni and donor resource management tool. Within this platform, the UT Foundation Business Intelligence department writes algorithms based upon the data that is within ANDI (Alumni and Donor Information) to provide predictive analytics on the likelihood for alumni to donate and engage with the university. These tools are used by alumni and development officers to determine which alumni would be best to approach for various projects and types of engagement or volunteer activities (Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force, 2018).

In relation to maintaining connections with the university, one purpose of the alumni relations staff is to help maintain accurate alumni information (Hoyt, 2004). Maintaining a strong alumni database is imperative to outreach efforts. Efforts were made by alumni staff to include frequent requests for updated information. The University of Tennessee Foundation uses vendors and other resources to maintain adequate records of alumni and donors so communication appeals, events notices, and fundraising efforts are communicated appropriately (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011b).

Higher Education Giving Motivations

Newman and Petrosko (2011) found a positive correlation between alumni experiences and alumni association perceptions to membership in the alumni association. AROs are tasked with utilizing alumni for the advancement of the university, whether that be by volunteering,

advocating politically, recruiting new students, and supporting the university financially. Alumni staff do this by priming alumni to “attain a disposition of readiness or motivation to give before a donation will be granted to the institution” (Hoyt, 2004, p. 1). While each of the engagement initiatives are important, the goal of the advancement cycle is to use each of the other initiatives to increase the financial support of the university.

Gallo (2019) discusses the commonly used phrase of friend-raising before fundraising. Philanthropy means the love of humanity. Care for alumni should be at the center of fundraising efforts (Gallo, 2019). This framework for alumni relations can be summed by explaining the four Ts. First, time is an asset within alumni relations. Volunteer time by alumni for the benefit of the university and for the benefit of other alumni can be an incredible engagement tool. Time given by alumni can help support collegiate departments, promote a message, or recruit future students (Gallo, 2019). The second T, talent, is closely related to the first. Alumni with skills that can assist the university can be mutually beneficial. First, alumni can provide program topics, but speaking engagements can also promote the alumni in front of a wide audience (Gallo, 2019). The third T is treasure. Alumni relations is the frontline efforts of fundraising amongst alumni and donors. Boards, councils, and committees can showcase the needs of the university and promote the need for treasure. Members are asked to promote the university’s needs to their circle of influence (Gallo, 2019). The fourth T is ties, or their network of influence. The connections alumni have with other alumni and those they have with business and communities can be powerful assets to fundraising initiatives. Through the four Ts, AROs can capitalize on the strength of their alumni in order to financially support the university (Gallo, 2019).

While higher education institutions receive benefits for participating alumni, Chadwick-Jones (1976) explains through the social exchange theory the relationship should be mutually

beneficial. Social exchange theory “links behavior to rewards or punishments” (Chadwick-Jones, 1976, p. 10). In terms of alumni relations, the social exchange theory implies alumni must also receive some benefit for participating, communicating, or donating to the university. In a study looking specially at African-American alumni, Drezner (2009) examines social exchange theory as it relates to the Africa-American alumni participation and giving trends. Drezner (2009) posits that a major perceived benefit for African American alumni participation is the idea that they are helping others in the African American community succeed. Other benefits might include career services, philanthropic desires, continuing education, and programming (Kateman, 2015).

The Student-College Relationship

A key higher education giving motivation is the student-college relationship built on the student’s time at the institution. Studies have shown a positive correlation between a student’s time at a university and the likelihood of engagement with the university after graduation (Gaier, 2005; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). Within these studies, engagement is considered attending an event or donating to the university. Alumni giving was shown to have a higher correlation with student satisfaction as opposed to alumni participation. Gaier (2005) suggests donating is easier and less time consuming to attending an event. However, the correlation for alumni participation is relevant, nonetheless.

McAlexander and Koenig (2001) conducted a study that investigated the student-college relationship as it applies to the current alumni experiences. The study found a positive correlation with alumni perception of the university and the student experience (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). The alumni perception was investigated by four factors including fun during college, a peak challenge experience that was transformational to the alumnus as a student, past

experience, and present experience. It was hypothesized that alumni perception was positively correlated to each of the four factors. The study confirmed this hypothesis. It was also hypothesized that the passage of time will not significantly influence the present alumni perception. The result was mixed with alumni more likely to donate over time, but also found the relationship can atrophy with the passage of time (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). The importance of these findings includes learning why alumni remain loyal to the university and continue to participate in engagement opportunities such as attending alumni events, wearing university apparel, and donating to the university (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001).

Alumni Communications

University development and AROs spend substantial resources cultivating and maintaining alumni relationships. One of the ways to facilitate relationships is to communicate a consistent message of mission and need to alumni and friends. Universities utilize many communication channels to tell the story of students, professors, and the needs of the university. Strategic communication is integral to the promotion of long-term engagement and interest of alumni (Levine, 2009).

Levine (2009) investigated the correlation between alumni giving and communication methods. While she stated there were many studies at the time that investigated annual giving or communication methods, there were few that discussed the correlation between the two. This research was important to determine what type of communication efforts were most beneficial to the participants. The findings could help determine how to allocate communication and appeal resources so the two support each other and are used efficiently and effectively (Levine, 2009). The hypothesis of this study suggested more frequent communication efforts would result in

higher donations to the university. The study found there were no connections between the frequency of communications (Bolman & Gallos, 2011). However, there were positive correlations with specific communication pieces. Alumni magazines and e-newsletters that were sent more frequently resulted in higher alumni participation and giving levels (Levine, 2009). From this study, it cannot be concluded that sending alumni magazines or e-newsletters result in gifts, but that a positive correlation exists in the number of gifts and the frequency of alumni communications.

Alumni Magazines

Alumni magazines and publications are one of the earliest ways universities engaged with their alumni. In 1891, Yale University created the *Yale Alumni Weekly*, now known as the *Yale Alumni Magazine*, as an alumni version of the *Yale Daily News* (Yale Alumni Magazine, 2020). The magazines featured articles on alumni and their accomplishments. The magazines serve as the primary, and sometimes only, connection to the university. Also, alumni magazines strive to sustain and build alumni connections to campus (Levine, 2009). Alumni magazines include articles about prominent alumni or donors, campus updates, and upcoming alumni event information. Alumni magazines can also serve as a stewardship piece by including lists of annual giving level donors.

E-Newsletters

Electronic newsletters have more recently been used to connect with alumni. These are normally sent quarterly or monthly to help strengthen the connection with alumni. News items differ from those within the alumni magazine. They are focused on catchy headlines, pictures, and quick read information which is meant to be consumed quickly (Levine, 2009). Chen (2018)

concluded alumni are more interested in reading information specifically targeted to alumni instead of the general university, such as what a university relations office might provide.

Although alumni electronic newsletters are not as interactive as other forms of communication, readers can read at their leisure and can come back to the newsletter in their inbox at any time to reference information listed (Shu-Jen Lin, Lin, & Lin, 2011). Levine (2009) found there was a positive correlation with the frequency of electronic alumni newsletters and the general giving participation rate amongst alumni.

Social Media

Farrow and Yuan (2011) conducted a study that investigated how the theory of the strength of ties relates to how university alumni use social networking sites (SNS) and how SNS usage relates to volunteerism and charitable giving. At the conclusion of the research, Farrow and Yuan (2011) concluded the frequency of alumni communication using SNS directly increased the tie strength along the communication frequency dimension and both directly and indirectly increased the emotional closeness dimension. The research model did not accurately predict who would give based upon higher communication from SNS, but it did positively correlate with alumni who were already donors. Findings included there was a direct impact on charitable giving based upon alumni who engaged in alumni groups on Facebook. The research also showed that behaviors positively correlated with frequency of communications, but did not change attitudes about charitable giving or volunteerism (Farrow & Yuan, 2011).

Summary

Themes have emerged throughout this literature review. First, while the main goal of higher education advancement divisions is to fundraise for the university, alumni relations and communications can often create alumni affinity for the institution (Levine, 2009). Next, research has shown that alumni who are engaged with the university are more likely to donate (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014; Wastyn, 2009). Finally, alumni prefer to receive some benefit from their involvement with the university (Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Drezner, 2009).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The population of the study included undergraduate alumni from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Criteria for the sample populations include alumni who have an email address on file and those who have at least one engagement factor entry. The research sample included participants who fully completed and returned the survey within the timeframe indicated in the survey instructions. Efforts were made to ensure there is only one survey completed per person. Participants were asked not to forward the survey to anyone who had not been selected to participate to maintain the limitations of the population.

Identification of variables

The variables in this study were developed based upon alumni relations literature and the proposed research questions. This study was designed to investigate UT Martin alumni preferences about online or virtual engagement and in-person engagement. The following variables were decided based upon the quantitative research proposed. A research question analysis was developed to determine the variables, see Appendix A. Once survey results from the quantitative research were collected and analyzed, qualitative research questions were created based upon the survey findings.

The research questions were investigated through a quantitative and qualitative approach using a survey and focus group interviews. This study is a nonexperimental study, which means there are only attribute independent variables based upon alumni characteristics (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). The attribute independent variables in each of the research questions were based on demographic information including age, academic major and degree, and location. Other attribute variables are listed below, but the research focus is preferences based on the attribute independent variables.

Research Questions

The first research question is, what is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred formats of alumni programming, either online or in-person? The attribute independent variables are demographic information including age, location, and academic background. The dependent variable is the preference of online or in-person alumni programming.

The second question is, what is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred types of alumni programming? The attribute independent variables are graduation year, location, and academic background. The dependent variable is preferred types of alumni programming.

The third research question is, what is the relationship between alumni donor status and alumni engagement? The attribute independent variable is alumni engagement status, and the dependent variable is alumni donor status.

The fourth research question is, what is the relationship between alumni engagement and preference on communications from the university versus academic program? The attribute

independent variable is communication preference, and the dependent variable is alumni engagement.

The fifth research question is, what is the relationship between collegiate experience perceptions and alumni engagement? Collegiate experience is the attribute independent variable, and the dependent variable is alumni engagement.

Other variables were collected throughout the study including demographic data such as graduation year and student activities. The data were analyzed with each survey question to determine if there are any correlations within demographic engagement factors that could lead to further study. Other variables collected were the current location of alumni and socioeconomic status including occupation, salary levels, and education level. These were measured based upon the data and metrics collected.

Data Collection

This mixed-methods research study was conducted by two methods of data collection. The first form of data collection was through a survey developed by the researcher. After the survey results were analyzed, questions were developed for qualitative interviews with the UT Martin Alumni Council members. Those interviews were analyzed and investigated in conjunction with the survey results to determine the research outcomes.

Quantitative Instrumentation

The first form of data collection was a survey that asked alumni questions related to the identified research questions. A survey used as an example was one developed by McDearmon (2011) for his dissertation about alumni engagement and donor status. Questions will be

structured in a Likert-style scale and include close-ended questions with ordered choices (Gliner et al., 2009). Questions included in the survey asked alumni about perception of online events, social media engagement, and preference of online versus in-person events.

Before the survey was sent to participants, the research and survey was first approved through the university's IRB approval process. After IRB approval was granted, the survey was sent to the proposed research sample. Gliner et al. (2009) suggested instruments developed by an investigator should be carefully constructed to provide at least basic evidence of reliability and validity. To do this, the proposed survey questions was sent to a sample population to check for the reliability of the results and to eliminate or edit any confusing questions. This sample population included a sample of the UT Martin alumni segment that was identified for this research. Those that are included in the survey test group will be excluded from the main survey population. Participants were given an individual link to the survey through Qualtrics. The links were investigated to make sure survey links were not shared and completed by anyone other than the intended alumnus/a.

Qualitative Focus Group

The second type of data collection was a qualitative focus group based upon follow-up questions to the quantitative survey. Members of the UT Martin Alumni Council, Young Alumni Council and Black Alumni Council were asked to participate in the qualitative portion of this research. The qualitative interviews were conducted in focus groups. The council members were asked to select a time from four proposed focus group options. Alumni signed up to the focus groups as their scheduled allowed, which helped randomize the demographics for each focus group. Of the alumni councils that were asked to participate, 13 members participated. The

demographic breakdown includes two males, eleven females; four African-Americans, nine white members; three Young Alumni Council members, and ten Alumni Council Members. To maintain validity, the interviews were recorded and then referenced when summarizing the results of the study. The qualitative survey included open-ended questions to solicit an array of opinions and answers (Gliner et al., 2009).

Research Design

This research was designed with a nonexperimental mixed-methods approach. Considering the data collection surveys and interviews, an associational research approach was used to compare the data. Depending on the research question, both the attribute independent variables and dependent variables had multiple levels. The research questions investigated the relationship between engagement data and demographic information. The main purpose of this study is to determine how or if the two are related.

The qualitative portion of this study used the phenomenological research approach. Research questions were focused on the experiences alumni have had with engagement opportunities provided by the University of Tennessee at Martin Office of Alumni Relations (Gliner et al., 2009). Questions were analyzed to look for significant statements that the alumni discussed. To do this, each interview was transcribed. Each interview question response was coded based upon repeating themes of the responses. After the qualitative interviews were coded, common themes were described in the results and discussion chapters of this dissertation.

Internal and external validity are important to ensure a relationship can be inferred or not after the results are analyzed (Gliner et al., 2009). For internal validity, alumni were chosen based upon reported engagement factors. The main threat to internal validity is that the survey

instrument and the qualitative portion of the study are interpreted consistently across participants and research questions. To accomplish this, specifically with the qualitative section, careful coding and attention to the construction of the questions and coding criteria was at the forefront of the research design process.

Considering external validity, careful attention was conducted when selecting the participants for the qualitative portion of the study (Gliner et al., 2009). The University of Tennessee at Martin Alumni Council members are selected carefully as representatives across all five colleges, graduation years, and demographics. The council members were interviewed based upon their engagement to the university. They discussed their preferences for various engagement opportunities.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for the proposed research occurred in two parts. First, the survey was analyzed to see if there were any correlating factors attributing to preferences on alumni engagement. The survey questions that pertain to each research question were analyzed for statistical significance. Once the survey results were analyzed, qualitative questions were developed for those questions that were not definitive.

The research questions were based on a nonexperimental, associational, and comparative research design. Each question will investigate if there is a relationship or association between the independent and dependent variables listed in the question. To analyze the results of the survey instrument, Chi Square test of association and linear regression analysis was used (Field, 2013).

The qualitative focus group interviews were analyzed for significant statements. The researcher transcribed each interview transcript. Then, the transcripts were coded to investigate significant statements from the UTM Alumni Council members. The transcripts were coded using QDA Miner software. A word analysis was conducted using word count and the word cloud functions. Then, the highest word counts were used to find common themes amongst each transcript. Each question transcript was coded separately so that individual question themes emerged. Once those statements were analyzed, they were compared with the quantitative results and discussed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the preferred methods of communication and engagement with the University of Tennessee at Martin alumni. Numerous studies have shown a correlation between alumni engagement and communication and increased alumni giving (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013; Coolman, 2011; Gaier, 2005; Hoyt, 2004). This chapter will review the results of this study from data collected by the researcher in 2022. This research will be used to influence the communication and alumni engagement practices of the University of Tennessee at Martin Office of Alumni Relations as well as give recommendations to other AROs with similar size alumni populations.

Data were collected using qualitative and quantitative methods. In June 2022, the researcher sent an email out to all UT Martin alumni who have an active email address on file with the UT Alumni Association. A reminder was sent two weeks later and resulted in 1,714 survey results from 19,971 contactable alumni. Results are described in the following sections.

Once the results were reviewed, the researcher then composed 11 qualitative research questions and invited the UT Martin Alumni Councils to participate in focus group discussions. These focus groups were organized in the fall of 2022. Over the course of four, hour-long interview sessions, 13 alumni were interviewed with qualitative research questions. These results will also be shared within this chapter.

Quantitative Research Summary

Survey Demographic Descriptive Statistics

At the date of research in summer of 2022, the University of Tennessee at Martin had 52,283 alumni. Of those, 47,768 alumni are considered active alumni who have current addresses or other contact information available. Also, 19,971 alumni have email addresses and do not have markers on their accounts for no contact. These 19,971 were sent the quantitative survey to complete. The response rate was 8.5% with 1,714 alumni responses. Of the respondents, 55% were female and 45% were male; 86% described themselves as white, 11% as black, and 3% as other. This is representative of the alumni that were sent the survey to complete. The ratio of all surveyable alumni is 56% female and 44% male and 65% describe themselves as White, 10% Black, 3% other, and 20% unknown.

The following tables, 4.1 and 4.2, include the descriptive statistics of the survey respondents. There was good representation in the sample from each college that returned survey results. Females in the College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences, which make up teachers and nurses, were the highest respondents while males in the College of Engineering and Natural Sciences were the lowest respondents. Most respondents were alumni who graduated from 1970-2019. While the survey asked for individual graduation years, the researcher compiled these into decade classification for ease of reporting.

Table 4.1 Gender and Graduating College Cross Tabulation

Graduating College	Female	Male
College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences	123	137
College of Business and Global Affairs	178	216
College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences	351	142
College of Engineering and Natural Sciences	56	84
College of Humanities and Fine Arts	145	117

Table 4.2 Graduating Decade

Graduating Decade	Count	Percentage
1940s	1	0.06%
1950s	6	0.35%
1960s	71	4.15%
1970s	292	17.07%
1980s	267	15.60%
1990s	294	17.18%
2000s	317	18.53%
2010s	388	22.68%
2020s	42	2.45%
No answer	33	1.93%

The following tables, Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 describe the location of the respondents. The states in Table 4.3 had more than 10 responses per state. There were 27 other states represented with less than 10 responses per state. The highest response was Tennessee with Georgia, Texas, Alabama, Florida, and Kentucky next.

Table 4.3 Location by State

State	Count	Percentage
Tennessee	1292	76.90%
Georgia	33	1.96%
Texas	32	1.90%
Alabama	30	1.79%
Florida	27	1.61%
Kentucky	27	1.61%
Mississippi	23	1.37%
North Carolina	20	1.19%
Missouri	18	1.07%
South Carolina	17	1.01%
Illinois	17	1.01%
Colorado	17	1.01%
Arkansas	16	0.95%
California	12	0.71%
Virginia	10	0.60%
Ohio	10	0.60%

Survey respondents live in 65 of the 95 counties in Tennessee. Table 4.4 shows every county that had 10 or more responses per county. The biggest responding county was Weakley County, although the highest population county for UT Martin Alumni is Shelby county with 4,212 as of October 2022. Weakley County is second highest in population with 3,264 as of October 2022. Table 4.5 shows that nearly 57% of responses were from alumni who live or work within 150 miles of Martin, TN.

Table 4.4 Location by County

County	Count of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Weakley	212	20.48%
Shelby	114	11.01%
Gibson	70	6.76%
Obion	66	6.38%
Davidson	54	5.22%
Madison	54	5.22%
Williamson	41	3.96%
Knox	35	3.38%
Dyer	33	3.19%
Tipton	25	2.42%
Sumner	25	2.42%
Rutherford	21	2.03%
Henry	21	2.03%
Fayette	20	1.93%
Carroll	20	1.93%
Crockett	15	1.45%
Benton	13	1.26%
Wilson	13	1.26%
Lauderdale	13	1.26%
McNairy	10	0.97%

Table 4.5 Location in distance from Martin

Row Labels	Count of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Live or work more than 150 miles of Martin, TN	595	34.75%
Live or work within 150 miles of Martin, TN	231	13.49%
Live or work within 100 miles of Martin, TN	202	11.80%
Live or work within 50 miles of Martin, TN	213	12.44%
Live or work within 25 miles of Martin, TN	328	19.16%
No Response	143	8.35%

The following tables describe the academic background and other demographic predictor information of the survey respondents. Table 4.6 describes the highest degrees earned of each of the respondents. Most of the respondents selected a Bachelors degree as the highest degree earned. Table 4.7 describes the salary ranges. The most common range is \$50,001-\$74,000 with a quarter of the repondents selecting that option. Table 4.8 describes the difference between online and in-person students. Over 90% of respondents considered themselves in-person students. Table 4.9 describes the majority of the respondents are alumni who attended the main campus and received a traditional collegiate education. However, 3% graduated from a regional center.

Table 4.6 Highest Degree Earned

Degree	Count of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Bachelors	703	44.86%
Masters	474	30.25%
Doctorate/Terminal	220	14.04%
Post - Masters	170	10.85%

Table 4.7 Salary Range

Salary Levels	Count Responses	Percentage of Responses
\$0-\$25,000	80	5.28%
\$25,001- \$50,000	268	17.69%
\$50,001 - \$75,000	397	26.20%
\$75,001 - \$100,000	269	17.76%
\$100,001 - \$125,000	158	10.43%
\$125,001 - \$150,000	92	6.07%
\$150,001 - Above	251	16.57%

Table 4.8 Online Student 50% time or more

Online Student	Count	Percentage
No	1418	90.43%
Yes	150	9.57%

Table 4.9 Regional Center Student 50% time or more

Regional Center Attendance	Count	Percentage
No	1531	97.33%
Yes, Jackson	12	0.76%
Yes, multiple Regional Centers	4	0.25%
Yes, Parsons	8	0.51%
Yes, Ripley	12	0.76%
Yes, Selmer	6	0.38%

Survey Responses Summary

Engagement and Communication Preferences

Table 4.10 describes the total count of survey respondents who have attended an event, committee meeting, or visited UT Martin since graduation. A slight majority has not attended nor visited UT Martin since graduation. Table 4.11 describes the ANDI Engagement Score for each respondent in relation to their reported event attendance. The majority of respondents have engagement scores of 3, 4, or 5, which shows those who completed the survey may be more likely to be engaged with the university. In evaluating this research, it will be important to note the results are biased towards alumni who already have an affinity for the university. Also important to note is some of the alumni have not been given engagement scores. This could be for a few reasons such as being a new graduate or an alumnus who had been lost but recently had their contact information updated.

Table 4.10 Have you attended an event, committee meeting, or visit to UT Martin since graduation?

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	704	44.87%
No	865	55.13%

Table 4.11 ANDI Engagement Score and Event Attendance

Attended an event	E0	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	EN-Not Scored
Yes	15	92	156	225	304	310	41
No	3	31	83	72	104	70	53
No Response	1	15	24	33	35	32	8

Table 4.12 describes the types of student organizations that alumni participated in while they were a student at UT Martin. 302 respondents did not report any participation in student organizations. The most selected option was Greek organizations (44%) with the next highest selected being academic organizations (42%).

Table 4.12 Student Organization Participation

Student Organizations	Count of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Academic Organization	598	42%
Greek Organizations	624	44%
Honor Organizations	384	27%
Housing Events	275	19%
International Travel Study	95	7%
Intramural athletics or Campus Rec Activities	517	37%
National Travel Study	39	3%
Religious Organizations	298	21%
Student (Undergraduate) Alumni Association	80	6%
Student Government Association	207	15%
University sponsored athletic team	181	13%
Other	327	23%

Social Media Participation

Table 4.13 shows the breakdown of responses for respondents who listed ‘yes’ and ‘no’ about participating in UT Martin social media within the past month. It is interesting to note that the top three alumni engagement responses, E3, E4, and E5, had more responses for ‘no’ combined. The most engaged alumni, E5, reported more engagement with social media, but only by 17 responses. Making a financial gift to the university is calculated into the engagement scores and is ranked one of the highest forms of engagement (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a). Tables 4.14, 4.15, and 4.16 describe preferences for social media platforms broken down by frequency, top preference, and all social media preferences. Table 4.16 shows the preference combinations for 54 responses for which social media platforms alumni use to connect with the University of Tennessee at Martin. Options included Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, and Other. UT Martin Alumni Relations utilizes

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A new platform the UT System uses is ConnectUT. This platform was available during this survey as it was just released. However, it was not added to this survey because of the proximity to the creation of the survey and its release. It is possible alumni selected “other” if they had signed up for ConnectUT.

Table 4.13 Question 14 Response “Have you read or liked/commented on a UT Martin social media post in the past month?”

Response	E0	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	EN-Not Scored
Yes	7	38	83	129	192	199	53
No	10	88	159	168	215	182	41
No Response	2	12	21	33	36	31	8

Table 4.14 Question 15 Response “On average, how often do you view UT Martin or UT Martin Alumni social media posts? (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, SnapChat, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, or Other)”

Frequency of Social Media Viewing	Count	Percentage
At least once a day	87	5.53%
At least once a week	347	22.07%
At least once a month	330	20.99%
At least once a year	129	8.21%
At least once every three months	184	11.70%
Never	360	22.90%
Viewed previously, but not within the past year	135	8.59%

Table 4.15 Social Media Types Preference

Social Media Type	Count	Percentage
Facebook	991	58%
Instagram	375	22%
None	394	23%
Other	156	9%
SnapChat	70	4%
TikTok	66	4%
Twitter	215	13%
YouTube	115	7%

Table 4.16 Social Media Usage by Combinations

Combination of Social Media Responses	Count	Percentage
Facebook	513	32.72%
None	391	24.94%
Facebook,Instagram	136	8.67%
Other	89	5.68%
Facebook,Instagram,Twitter	64	4.08%
Facebook,Twitter	48	3.06%
Facebook,Other	45	2.87%
Instagram	36	2.30%
Facebook,YouTube	32	2.04%
Twitter	23	1.47%
Facebook,Instagram,YouTube	18	1.15%
Facebook,Instagram,SnapChat	17	1.08%
Facebook,Twitter,YouTube	13	0.83%
Facebook,Instagram,TikTok	12	0.77%

Preference of Engagement

Table 4.17 shows nearly 60% of respondents said they would highly prefer or somewhat prefer in-person engagement while only 26% said they would highly prefer or somewhat prefer online engagement. Tables 4.18 and 4.19 below show the breakdown of types of preferred virtual and in-person engagement. The highest response for virtual engagement was 36% for “I would

not attend a virtual event.” The next highest responses were educational (29%), reunion events (16%), professional development (15%), and social or networking events (13%). Reunion events was also the highest response for in-person programming with 42% and social events reported at 30%.

Table 4.17 Preferred Formats for Engagement with UTM

Preference Selection	Preference for In-Person		Preference for Online	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Highly prefer	511	30%	138	8%
Somewhat prefer	515	30%	314	18%
Neither prefer nor dislike	417	24%	577	34%
Somewhat dislike	95	6%	343	20%
Highly dislike	34	2%	194	11%

Table 4.18 Preferred Types of Virtual Events and Virtual Programming

Question 21 - What types of VIRTUAL events or VIRTUAL programs would you likely attend or participate?	Count	Percentage
Alumni achievement award presentation	134	8%
Alumni interviews	139	8%
Cultural exhibition (music, theater, reading, etc.)	210	12%
Educational (lecture from a faculty member on a special topic)	502	29%
Gala or donor recognition event	68	4%
Industry specific event	178	10%
Networking	212	12%
Online book club	199	12%
Professional development (resume workshop, mock interview, portfolio review)	264	15%
Reunion event	266	16%
Social (networking)	217	13%
Trivia or game night	188	11%
UTM student or alumni exhibitions	207	12%
Young alumni event	59	3%
I would not attend a virtual event	611	36%

Table 4.19 Preferred Types of In-person Events and Programming

Question 20 - Which of the following events and programs would you be interested or likely to attend IN-PERSON at a UT Martin or off-campus location? Select all that apply.	Count	Percentage
Alumni achievement awards	190	11%
Alumni day/reunion	726	42%
Alumni event at an annual industry conference	177	10%
Cultural exhibitions	267	16%
Educational program (lecture from UTM faculty member or alumna/us)	336	20%
Family friendly event	431	25%
Gala or donor recognition event	239	14%
Networking event	360	21%
Professional development program (resume workshop, mock interview, portfolio review)	202	12%
Social event (ex. happy hour)	508	30%
Students or prospective student event	181	11%
UTM student or alumni exhibitions	383	22%
Volunteer event	224	13%
Young alumni event	115	7%
I would not attend any event	364	21%

Communication Preferences

The following tables describes the communication preferences of the survey respondents. Nearly a third of the respondents, 30.49%, prefers to receive information from UTM Alumni through email communication only. The next preference is for a combination of email and the Campus Scene magazine with 11.68%. Less than 10% of the respondents prefer some type of communication combination including social media.

Table 4.20 Communication Preference by Type

Question 19 - How would you like to receive information from the UTM Office of Alumni Relations? Select all that apply.	Count	Number of responses
Campus Scene Magazine	705	41%
Email	1,293	75%
Other	39	2%
Postal Service	477	28%
Social Media	507	30%

Table 4.21 Communication Preference by Combination

Communication Type	County	Percentage
Email	475	30.49%
Email,Campus Scene Magazine	182	11.68%
Email,Social Media,Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine	144	9.24%
Email,Social Media	142	9.11%
Email,Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine	131	8.41%
Email,Social Media,Campus Scene Magazine	102	6.55%
Campus Scene Magazine	82	5.26%
Email,Postal Service	74	4.75%
Postal Service	50	3.21%
Social Media	45	2.89%
Email,Social Media,Postal Service	34	2.18%
Other	24	1.54%
Social Media,Campus Scene Magazine	23	1.48%
Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine	23	1.48%
Social Media,Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine	8	0.51%
Social Media,Postal Service	4	0.26%
Email,Social Media,Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine,Other	3	0.19%
Email,Other	3	0.19%
Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine,Other	3	0.19%
Email,Postal Service,Campus Scene Magazine,Other	2	0.13%

Alumni Engagement Perceptions

The following tables describe the survey responses for alumni engagement perceptions. The survey asked how engaged the respondent feels towards UT Martin. Table 4.22 shows that only 11% said they were highly engaged while nearly 43% said they were not engaged at all. Table 4.23 compares the responses with the actual engagement score that is reported on their ANDI alumni record (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a). The comparison of actual engagement scores versus alumni perception of engagement differs quite drastically.

Table 4.22 Alumni Feeling of Engagement with UT Martin

Feeling of Engagement Level	Count	Percentage
I am highly engaged and volunteer with UT Martin	172	11.18%
I am engaged with UT Martin and would like to become more involved	277	18.01%
I am not engaged with UT Martin, but would like to become more involved	428	27.83%
I am not engaged with UT Martin and prefer not to increase my involvement with UTM	661	42.98%

Table 4.23 Alumni Feeling of Engagement with UT Martin Engagement Score

Feeling of Engagement Level	E0	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	EN-None	#N/A
I am highly engaged and volunteer with UT Martin	6	58	137	123	166	121	48	2
I am engaged with UT Martin and would like to become more involved	7	36	61	93	108	94	27	2
I am not engaged with UT Martin, but would like to become more involved	2	21	25	49	81	87	11	1
I am not engaged with UT Martin and prefer not to increase my involvement with UTM	3	7	14	27	46	70	5	
No response	1	16	26	38	42	40	11	

Financial Support

The following tables describe the perceived and actual financial support of the respondents. The responses for consideration of a future gift were split evenly with 44% responding both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ with consideration of making a future gift in Table 4.24. The survey results were matched via a V-Lookup formula in excel to compare the responses to the alumnus’s alumni record information. Table 4.25 shows that results were similar in percentage with 55% of respondents listed as current donors while 45% of responses have never made a financial gift to UT Martin.

Table 4.24 Consideration of Future Gift

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	770	44.98%
No	767	44.80%
No Response	175	10.22%

Table 4.25 Actual Giving History of Respondents

Current Donor/Non-Donor	Donor Count	Donor Percent
Non-Donor	762	44.64%
Donor	945	55.36%

Giving Appeal Preference

The quantitative survey asked respondents to list their preferred method of giving appeals. Giving appeals are sent or organized through the UT Martin Office of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving. Respondents listed that Captain’s Challenge, UT Martin’s one-day-of-giving, was the preferred method of solicitation of a gift. This campaign is organized through email and social media platforms and does not include any postal mail appeal. Nearly 50% of the

annual gifts raised in 2022 were through the Captain’s Challenge campaign. As shown in Table 4.26, alumni respondents listed they preferred email giving requests (36%) and letter appeals through the postal service (29%). In reality, letter appeals are the second highest producer of annual gifts at UT Martin. Respondents might have included email as a method while also considering how they make a gift during Captain’s Challenge.

Table 4.26 Preferred Giving Appeals

Appeal Type	Count	Percentage
Captain's Challenge - UTM one day-of-giving, social media and online campaign	621	36%
Email giving request	621	36%
Letter appeal via postal service	495	29%
Personal call/visit/email from UT Martin staff member	150	9%
Telefund - phone call appeal from a student	50	3%

Quantitative Research Question Analysis

Research Question 1

What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred formats of alumni programming, either online or in-person?

This quantitative portion of this research question was analyzed using a regression analysis between demographic information including graduation year, location, and academic background and the survey response on alumni preferred formats of alumni programming, either online or in-person. While multiple demographic information was collected, only certain demographic information will be used for the purpose of this research. Graduation year will be

used to identify alumni within an approximate age range. While there might be slight variations in age and graduation year, UT Martin is a traditional 4-year institution and programming is based upon graduation year instead of age. Approximate distance will be used to investigate location, and graduating college will be used to investigate academic background.

First, Table 4.27 shows 60% of respondents either highly prefer or somewhat prefer in-person engagement while only 26% highly prefer or somewhat prefer online engagement.

Table 4.27 Preferred Formats for Engagement with UTM

Preference Selection	Preference for In-Person		Preference for Virtual	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Highly prefer	511	30%	138	8%
Somewhat prefer	515	30%	314	18%
Neither prefer nor dislike	417	24%	577	34%
Somewhat dislike	95	6%	343	20%
Highly dislike	34	2%	194	11%

Quantitatively, through this research question, the researcher investigated the effect of demographic information, graduation year, location, and graduating college, on preference of virtual engagement and in-person engagement. The dependent variable of preference of virtual engagement was regressed on predicting variables of graduation year, location, and graduating college. The independent variables significantly predict preference of virtual engagement, $F(3,1536) = 8.015, p < .001$, which indicates that the demographic factors have a significant relationship with preference of virtual engagement. The $R^2 = .015$ depicts that the model explains 1.5% of the variance of preference of virtual engagement. Additionally, coefficients were further assessed to determine the influence of each of the factors on preference of virtual engagement. The results revealed that graduation year has a significant and positive relationship with virtual

engagement preference (B= .092, t =3.609, p <.001). Next, the results revealed that location (approximate distance from Martin variable) has a significant and negative relationship with virtual engagement preference (B= -.061, t = -3.360, p. = <.001). Finally, the results revealed that graduating college did not have a significant relationship with virtual engagement preference (B = -.017, t = -.661, p. = .508). See Table 4.28.

Table 4.28 Regression Analysis for Virtual Engagement Preferences

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.165	.101		31.303	<.001	2.966	3.363
Graduation_Year	.006	.002	.092	3.609	<.001	.003	.009
Approx. Distance from Martin	-.061	.018	-.085	-3.360	<.001	-.096	-.025
Degee_College	-.015	.022	-.017	-.661	.508	-.058	.029

a. Dependent Variable: Preference_Virtual_Format

Next, the dependent variable of preference of in-person engagement was regressed on predicting variables of graduation year, location, and graduating college. The independent variables significantly predict in-person engagement preference, $F(3,1540) = 6.01$, $p < .001$. The $R^2 = .012$ depicts that the model explains 1.2% of the variance of preference of in-person engagement. Coefficients were then further analysed to determine the relationship of each independent variable with in-person engagement. The results revealed that graduation year has a significant and negative relationship with in-person engagement preference (B = -.054, t = -2.116, p = .035). The results also revealed that location (approximate distance from Martin) has a significant and positive relationship with in-person engagement preference (B = .092, t = 3.628, p <.001). Finally, the results revealed that graduating college did not have a significant

relationship with preference of in-person engagement (B = .020, t = .805, p.= .421). See Table 4.29.

Table 4.29 Regression Analysis for In-person Engagement Preferences

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.968	.090		21.748	<.001	1.790	2.146
Graduation_Year	-.003	.001	-.054	-2.116	.035	-.006	.000
Approx. Distance from Martin	.058	.016	.092	3.628	<.001	.027	.090
Degee_College	.016	.020	.020	.805	.421	-.023	.055

a. Dependent Variable: Preference_InPerson_Format

Qualitatively, the focus group questions 3, 5, and 10 address this research question. The only demographic element that was mentioned to affect preferred formats was the distance a person lives from Martin or the place of the event. This was specifically addressed in focus group question 3. Most alumni realized the need for both in-person and virtual formats depending on the event purpose. However, those who preferred virtual said they did so because of convenience of participating even if they could not attend the event in person. Specifically, focus group Participant 3 said he “was in Florida and was able to get on the focus group Zoom and collaborate with other alumni.” He also mentioned there are a lot of alumni outside the regional area of Martin where it makes it difficult to come for a visit or meeting.

Research Question 2

What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred types of alumni programming? Examples include speakers, volunteerism, continuing education, and career services.

This research question was analyzed using a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis will investigate select demographic information and the responses for preferred types of virtual and in-person engagement. The qualitative focus groups discussed this research question within focus group questions 5 and 10. While participants discussed which types of programming were their favorite, no themes emerged about how demographic information affects these preferences. The preferences seemed to hinge on personalities rather than any one type of demographic point. The qualitative analysis used select questions from the focus group discussions. For this research, the college in which an alumnus graduated was used to quantitatively determine the relationship between academic background and preferred types of alumni programming.

For the quantitative analysis, the top five most preferred types of virtual programming were analyzed and the top six most preferred types of in-person programming were analyzed using Pearson chi-square. One additional in-person programming type was analyzed because of a tie in percentage for the “Networking Event” selection and “Do not prefer to attend any event” selection. Both virtual programming and in-person programming options included the “Do not prefer to attend any event” selection for in-person and virtual engagements. The most preferred virtual types of programming included educational lecture programming (29%), reunion event (16%), professional development (15%), and social/networking (13%) event. Of the respondents,

36% selected that they would not attend any type of virtual event. The most preferred in-person types of programming included reunion events (42%), social events (30%), family-friendly events (25%), student and alumni exhibitions (22%), and networking (21%). Of the respondents, 21% of alumni prefer not to attend any type of in-person event. Table 4.18 and 4.19 describes the reported percentages and counts of preferred types of events.

Pearson Chi-Square Analysis of Preference of Virtual Programming

The chi-square analyses for virtual programming produced significant results for some demographic data. After the series of chi-square tests were run, the researcher observed the percentages of each finding. First, the demographic data point of graduation year was analyzed and split into 15-year segments to compute Pearson Chi-Square. Graduation years 1950-1964 are reported as selection 1, years 1965-1979 are 2, years 1980-1994 are 3, years 1995-2000 are 4, and years 2010-2022 are reported as 5. Significant associations were found among all five of the top virtual engagement types and graduation years. There was a significant association between the preference of virtual education lectures and graduation year segments $\chi^2 (4) = 35.82, p < .001$.

Next, there was a significant association between preference of virtual reunions and graduation year segments $\chi^2 (4) = 19.535, p < .001$. There was also a significant association between virtual professional development and graduation year segments $\chi^2 (4) = 87.91, p < .001$. Finally, there was a significant association between the “do not prefer to attend any virtual event” and graduation year $\chi^2 (4) = 24.132, p < .001$. Based upon the percentage of preferences listed in Table 4.30, recent graduates, specifically graduation years 1995-2022, seem to prefer more types of virtual alumni programming than earlier graduates. Additionally, the selection of “prefer not to attend virtual events” confirms this with 23% of 1995-2009 and 21.5% of 2010-

2022 preferring not to attend any virtual event compared to 29.5% and 26.2% selecting at least one virtual event they would attend.

Table 4.30 Percentage Results of Preference of Virtual Events and Graduation Year

Preference in Virtual Types of Programming Significant Findings					
Grad Year Segments	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of Vir. Ed. Lecture					
Pearson Chi-Square < 0.001					
% within Ed. Lecture - 0	1.90%	22%	28.90%	24.90%	22.40%
% within Ed. Lecture - 1	0.40%	15.20%	22%	32.70%	29.70%
Preference of Virtual Reunion					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Reunion - 0	1%	19.10%	27%	27.10%	25.70%
% within Reunion - 1	3.80%	24.50%	25.70%	27.50%	18.5
Preference of Vir. Prof. Dev.					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Prof Dev - 0	1.70%	22.90%	28.20%	25.10%	22.10%
% within Prof Dev - 1	0%	4.20%	19.30%	38.60%	37.90%
Preference of Vir. Social Event					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Social - Select 0	1.60%	21.30%	27.40%	26%	23.60%
% within Social - Select 1	0.50%	10.60%	22.60%	35%	31.30%
Prefer not to attend Virtual					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Not Attend - 0	1.50%	17%	25.80%	29.50%	26.20%
% within Not Attend - 1	1.50%	25.30%	28.60%	23%	21.50%

The next demographic element investigated was approximate distance from Martin. (Table 4.31) There was a significant association between approximate distance from Martin and preference of virtual reunion $\chi^2(4) = 25.61, p < .001$. There was no significant association between approximate distance from Martin and the following preferred types of virtual programming, educational lectures, social events, and professional development. There was also no significant association found between preference to not attend any virtual event and

approximate distance from Martin. Table 4.38 visualizes the percentage of selections of virtual reunions segmented by approximate distance from Martin. While there is a significant association between virtual reunions and approximate distance from Martin, it can be concluded that approximate distance from Martin does not show a significant association with preference of virtual events given the other types of virtual programming were not significant.

Table 4.31 Percentage of Significant Results Between Approximate Distance from Martin and Virtual Programming

Preference in Virtual Types of Programming Significant Findings					
Approx. Distance from Martin	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of Virtual Reunion					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Reunion - 0	22.6	14.1	13.3	14.5	35.5
% within Reunion - 1	12.5	10.9	10.9	15.8	49.8

Finally, the graduating college of each alumnus participant was analyzed in relation to preference of virtual types of programming (See Table 4.32). Only one selection was significant. There was a significant association between graduating college and virtual social events $\chi^2(4) = 10.04, p .04$. As visualized in Table 4.32, most respondents in the College of Business and Global Affairs (2) and Humanities and Fine Arts (5) preferred virtual social events, 29% and 22.1% respectively. Although there is a significant finding with preference of virtual social events, there was not a significant association between the other most selected types of virtual engagement. It can be concluded that apart from virtual social events, there is not a significant relationship between graduating college and preference of virtual social events.

Table 4.32 Percentage of Significant Results between Graduating College and Preference of Virtual Social Events

Preference in Virtual Types of Programming Significant Findings					
Degree College	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of Vir. Social Event					
Pearson Chi-Square <.04					
% within Social - Select 0	17.30%	24.90%	32.20%	9.50%	16.10%
% within Social - Select 1	13.40%	29%	29.50%	6.00%	22.10%

Pearson Chi-Square Analysis of Preference of In-Person Programming

The top six selections for in-person programming were analyzed based upon the same demographic information of graduation year, approximate distance from Martin, and graduating college. For graduation year segments, there were significant associations found between graduation year and the following types of in-person events; social events $\chi^2 (4) = 23.14$, $p < .001$, family friendly events $\chi^2 (4) = 60.92$, $p < .001$, student and alumni exhibitions $\chi^2 (4) = 38.25$, $p < .001$, networking events $\chi^2 (4) = 66.79$, $p < .001$, and the selection for would not attend any in-person event $\chi^2 (4) = 23.13$, $p < .001$. Based on the percentage of selection amongst respondents, it can be concluded that more recent graduates also prefer in-person events relative to earlier graduates, see Table 4.33.

Table 4.33 Graduation Year Segments and Preferred In-Person Programing Selection Percentages

Preference in In-Person Types of Programming Significant Findings					
Grad Year Segments	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of In-Person Social					
Pearson Chi-Square < 0.001					
% within Social - 0	1.7	22	28	25.5	22.7
% within Social - 1	0.8	15	24	31.3	28.9
Preference of In Person Family Event					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Family - 0	1.8	23.2	28.4	24.2	22.4
% within Family - 1	0.5	10.5	22.1	36	30.9
Pref of In-Person Alumni Exhibition					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Alumni Exhibition - 0	1.6	22.1	28.5	25.5	22.4
% within Alumni Exhibition - 1	1	12.5	21.1	33.2	32.1
Pref of In-Person Networking Event					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Networking - Select 0	1.8	23	28.3	24.8	22.2
% within Networking - Select 1	0.3	8.6	21.4	36.2	33.4
Prefer not to attend In-Person Events					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Not Attend - 0	1.1	18.2	26.4	28.6	25.6
% within Not Attend - 1	2.8	26.4	28.4	21.8	20.7

Next, approximate distance from Martin and in-person preference type was analyzed to determine significance. There was a significant association between all six of the top in-person event types and approximate distance from Martin; reunion events $\chi^2(4) = 29.99, p < .001$, social events $\chi^2(4) = 17.83, p < .001$, family friendly events $\chi^2(4) = 81.55, p < .001$, student and alumni exhibitions $\chi^2(4) = 37.61, p < .001$, networking events $\chi^2(4) = 11.46, p .022$, and the selection of would not attend any in-person event $\chi^2(4) = 42.89, p < .001$. Based on the percentage of alumni who selected at least one in-person event preference, we can conclude that only alumni who are

the furthest distance away, over 150 miles, would not prefer to attend any type of in-person event (see Table 4.34).

Table 4.34 Alumni Location and Preferred In-Person Programing Percentages

Preference in In-Person Types of Programming Significant Findings					
Grad Year Segments	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of In-Person Social					
Pearson Chi-Square < 0.001					
% within Social - 0	1.7	22	28	25.5	22.7
% within Social - 1	0.8	15	24	31.3	28.9
Preference of In Person Family Event					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Family - 0	1.8	23.2	28.4	24.2	22.4
% within Family - 1	0.5	10.5	22.1	36	30.9
Pref of In-Person Alumni Exhibition					
Pearson Chi-Square < .001					
% within Alumni Exhibition - 0	1.6	22.1	28.5	25.5	22.4
% within Alumni Exhibition - 1	1	12.5	21.1	33.2	32.1
Pref of In-Person Networking Event					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Networking - Select 0	1.8	23	28.3	24.8	22.2
% within Networking - Select 1	0.3	8.6	21.4	36.2	33.4
Prefer not to attend In-Person Events					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Not Attend - 0	1.1	18.2	26.4	28.6	25.6
% within Not Attend - 1	2.8	26.4	28.4	21.8	20.7

The last demographic segment analyzed with in-person programming was graduating college. As shown in Table 4.35, only two of the top six selections for in-person programming showed a significant relationship with graduating colleges. There was a significant association between graduating college and in-person social events $\chi^2(4) = 18.85, p < .001$. Based upon the percentages of preferences (see Table 40.1), the College of Business and Global affairs, and

Humanities and Fine Arts preferred in-person social events. There was also a significant association between graduating college and in-person networking events $\chi^2(4) = 26.44, p < .001$. Interestingly, the same colleges, Business and Global Affairs and Humanities and Fine Arts also had more respondents say they preferred in-person networking events.

Table 4.35 Degree College and Preferred In-Person Programing Selection Percentages

Degree College	1	2	3	4	5
Preference of In-Person Social					
Pearson Chi-Square < 0.001					
% within Social - 0	17.2	23.2	34.4	9.7	15.6
% within Social - 1	15.9	30.3	26.5	7.6	19.7
Pref of In-Person Networking Event					
Pearson Chi-Square .022					
% within Social - Select 0	17.5	23.5	33.8	9.8	15.4
% within Social - Select 1	14.3	32.2	25.2	6.4	21.8

The qualitative focus groups discussed this research question within focus group questions 5 and 10. While participants discussed which types of programming were their favorite, no themes emerged about how demographic information affects these preferences. Each participant had different preference types. The preferences seemed to hinge on personalities rather than any one type of demographic point.

In conclusion, there are significant relationships between demographic information and preferred types of alumni engagement events. There are more examples of significant relationships amongst in-person events than virtual events. There are also more significant relationships between graduation year and preference of events. Not surprisingly, all in-person types of events showed a significant relationship with approximate distance from Martin. Notably, while the significant preferences of types of in-person events and virtual events were

small regarding degree college, the College of Business and Global Affairs and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts showed the most preference for in-person and virtual events more than the other three colleges.

Research Question 3

What, if any, is the relationship between alumni donor status and alumni engagement?

This research question was quantitatively analyzed using a one-way ANOVA for alumni donor status and alumni engagement. The researcher compared the survey results using a V-Lookup formula in excel to match their giving information and ANDI engagement scores to the survey results. This survey asked respondents to list whether they would make a future gift. However, it was deemed more reliable to use the actual giving information to date for each survey respondent. The data were sorted into having donated previous (regardless of amount) and not making a previous donation. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare any differences between engagement scores and alumni giving. There was a significant effect of alumni engagement scores on alumni giving at the $p < .05$ level for the two conditions or giving and not giving [$F(5,1701) = 22.751, p < .001$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for all engagement scores was significant; engagement scores 5 ($M=.72, SD=.448$), 4 ($M=.60, SD = .491$), 3 ($M=.52, SD=.500$), 2 ($M=.42, SD=.495$), 1 ($M=.46, SD=.500$), and engagement score 0 ($M=.31, SD=.463$) ("How do I report a 1-way between subjects ANOVA in APA style?," 2008). Taken together, these results suggest that the higher the engagement score, the more likely an alumnus is to have made a monetary donation.

Table 4.36 Linear Regression Model for Engagement Scores and Alumni Giving Information

		ANOVA^a				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.683	1	24.683	105.961	<.001 ^b
	Residual	397.163	1705	.233		
	Total	421.845	1706			

a. Dependent Variable: GivingYesorNo_Numbers

b. Predictors: (Constant), Numbered Engagement Score

Research Question 3 was also analyzed using qualitative data from the focus group interviews. Focus group questions 2 and 8 discussed the factors that the participants consider and then what they believe affects alumni giving in general.

Focus group question 2 investigated reasons why alumni personally give. One of the five coded answers was “maintain connection with university.” Participant 10 said she gives to remain connected and engaged with the university. While most of the discussion and research has investigated what types of engagement lead to giving, this new theme of using giving as a means of engagement was a new idea for the researcher.

Focus group question 8 asked specifically what the respondents believe affects alumni giving. The three themes discussed were passion, student need, and impact. All of these selections had an undertone of knowing and understanding where the gifts were being used. The participants were already engaged alumni, so they were familiar with where their gifts are going. However, most responses centered around the fact that it is important to communicate where and how the funds are being spent through whatever means is available.

Research Question 4

What, if any, is the relationship between alumni engagement and preference on types of communications from the university?

This research question was analyzed using a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Table 4.20, shown earlier, shows the alumni responses for Question 19 of the quantitative survey. The preferred types of communications are emails (75% of respondents), the Campus Scene Alumni magazine (41% of respondents), social media (30% of respondents), postal service (28% of respondents) and 2% of respondents selected other. Respondents were able to select all the options that apply to them. Alumni engagement is quantified by the ANDI Alumni Engagement Score calculated the University of Tennessee Foundation (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a).

To quantitatively analyze this research question, the researcher split the alumni responses for survey Question 19 into five separate data points, one for each type of communication. Also, in order to analyze this research question using Pearson's chi-square, the ANDI Alumni Engagement Score was converted to five data points instead of six, including those who had no alumni engagement score. To do this, the researcher combined the top highest alumni engagement scores of 4 and 5. An alumni engagement score of 0 indicates no alumni engagement and an engagement score of 1 indicates the very lowest ranking of alumni engagement. Within the UT Martin Office of Alumni Relations, alumni engagement scores of 4 and 5 are often selected together to indicate the highest engaged UT Martin alumni. Alumni engagement scores and alumni communication preferences were then individually analyzed using Pearson's chi-square to determine if there was a significant relationship between alumni

engagement scores and types of communication preferences. There was a significant association between the preference for email and alumni engagement score $\chi^2(4) = 29.99, p < .001$. Based on the percentage of alumni that selected email as a communication preference, only the majority of engagement scores 4/5 preferred email communications with 53.7% of responses. There was also a significant association between preference for the Campus Scene and alumni engagement scores $\chi^2(4) = 26.44, p < .001$. Similarly, only engagement scores 4/5 showed the majority of respondents preferring the Campus Scene magazine with 54.3%. (See Table 4.37)

Table 4.37 Percentage of Communication Preferences by Alumni Engagement Score

Communication Preferences Significant Findings					
Engagement Scores	0	1	2	3	4
Email Preference					
Pearson Chi-Square <.001					
% within Email Preference - 0	7.2	10	19.5	24.1	38.9
% within Email Preference - 1	7.1	7.5	14	17.8	53.7
Campus Scene Preference					
Pearson Chi-Square .007					
% within Campus Scene Pref - 0	8.6	8	16.4	19.5	47.1
% within Campus Scene Pref - 1	5	8	13.9	18.5	54.3

The qualitative focus group questions that addressed this research question include 4, 7, and 9. An important aspect to note within the qualitative focus groups is all the participants were already highly involved with the university. The responses are based off an engaged alumnus perspective.

Question 4 listed the preferred types of communication amongst the focus group participants. The Campus Scene magazine had four mentions while social media had three mentions. The e-newsletter, in-person information sessions, and personal outreach were also

mentioned. While it is important to note the frequency of each of the preferred types of communication methods, the consensus with this question is that all avenues of communication should be used when reaching out to alumni. Most of the focus group participants displayed a preference for multiple modes of communication depending on the information they were seeking.

Question 7 discusses the perception of how social media affects alumni engagement. By using the Coding by Variable function with QDR Miner, the top coded results (7 appearances each) include “enhances connection” and “informational” which refers to the benefit of social media. “Ease of connection” was coded five times within the transcript. The results of this question again reiterates that a variety of communication forms is important. Social media is a top method of alumni information consumption because of the benefits of receiving information quickly and frequently.

Question 9 asks about which communication method is most effective. As is evident in question 7, social media rose to the top in terms of preference. By using the coding by variable function in QDA Miner, social media received 10 mentions within the transcript. Handwritten notes received six mentions while the Campus Scene received four mentions. Receiving information through a variety of methods received three mentions. Multiple people mentioned more than one preference of communication during the transcript, making this the most accepted option.

Through the qualitative focus group analysis, there does not appear to be a clear connection between a singular type of communication and alumni engagement. It is evident from the responses that alumni who are engaged view a myriad of communications from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Qualitatively, there does not appear to be a correlation

between types of communication, rather there is a correlation between consumption of communication and alumni engagement.

Research Question 5

What, if any, is the relationship between collegiate experience perceptions and alumni engagement?

This research question was analyzed using linear regression. The researcher added a column of data to the data set that included a yes and no answer to student collegiate participation. If a respondent listed they participated in even one organization, their response was marked with a yes (1). If they did not list any student organization participation, their response was marked a no (0). Table 4.38 shows the SPSS output. A one-way ANOVA between subjects was conducted to compare the effect of student organization participation on alumni engagement. There was a significant effect of student organization participation on alumni engagement at the $p < .05$ level for the participation conditions [$F(1,1705) = 8.988, p = .003$]. The means of the responses of no (0) is ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.53$) and yes (1) is ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.51$). The means show that alumni who participated in student activities have a higher mean engagement score than those who did not.

Table 4.38 Student Organization Participation and Alumni Engagement Regression Analysis

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.540	1	20.540	8.988	.003 ^b
	Residual	3896.413	1705	2.285		
	Total	3916.954	1706			

- a. Dependent Variable: Numbered Engagement Score
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Yes or No Student Org Participation

Research question 5 was also qualitatively analyzed through the focus group discussions. Focus group questions 1 and 6 addressed this particular research question. Focus group question 1 addresses why alumni stay engaged after graduation, and focus question 6 discussed the student factors that affect alumni engagement.

After focus group question 1 was coded, it was clear that student experiences are a key factor for continued engagement after students matriculate from a university. Student experiences accounted for 9 of the coded segments within the transcript. In addition, “people connections” account for 9 other segments with the transcript. Most of the “people connection” discussion points centered around relationships that were made while the alumnus was a student.

Focus group question 6 also addressed collegiate experience. Using the coding by variable function in QDR Miner, the segments coded by greek life, mentor, and personal relationships, all received two mentions within the transcript. Again, one particular student engagement factor did not stand out amongst the rest as being the stand out data point for future alumni engagement. However, all of the coded factors centered around relationships made within each of the segments. Relationships were mentioned in all of the following coded segments: greek life, athletics, mentors, personal relationship/friendships, other student orgs, and academic experiences. The consensus points to relationships made, regardless of the organization or method of how a student makes relationships.

With the quantitative and qualitative analysis completed for this question, it is clear that collegiate experiences are extremely important for future alumni engagement. However, through this research, it is not clear whether a certain collegiate experience stands out amongst the rest. The consistent theme is students have experiences in college that lead to meaningful relationships.

Qualitative Focus Group Discussion Summary

The following section is the summary of the qualitative focus group interviews. Thirteen alumni participated over four interview sessions. The participants were comprised of the UT Martin Alumni Council, the Black Alumni Council, and the Young Alumni Council. Each interview session lasted approximately an hour and was hosted via Zoom. The qualitative focus group questions were developed after the survey results were reviewed. The focus group questions include clarifying questions as well as expansion questions from the quantitative survey. The participants were asked the questions in order and were free to answer as they felt compelled to answer. Not all of the participants answered every question. However, the researcher asked them to respond if their answer differed from answers previously stated.

Qualitative Focus Group Coding Analysis

Once the focus groups were completed, the video recordings were transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were split into eleven documents, one for each question. Each question was then loaded into QDA Miner as an individual project to investigate the common themes and responses. The researcher utilized the cluster extraction and the word frequency tools within QDA Miner to build the coding system for each question. The coding system used was individual for each question. Although the coding systems were all individual and differed slightly from one question to the next, the common themes amongst all the questions included engagement preferences, giving preferences, communication preferences, and requested services from the UT Martin Alumni Relations office. The following section reviews the coding that was used to analyze each selection.

Focus Group Question 1

Explain why you are engaged with UT Martin and why you stayed engaged after graduation.

There were four main themes that emerged from this question: engagement, services, giving, and student experiences. The first theme, engagement, centered around people connections. The respondents stated they stayed engaged because of relationships they had with professors or with friends and classmates. The next theme was services, and more specifically, mentorship. One participant quoted former Chancellor Keith Carver and said, “We are all just turtles on a fence post. We all had help getting where we are.” Participants said they were helped along the way and stay engaged so that they can return the favor to future alumni. Next, Participant 10 mentioned that he stays engaged because of the opportunity of personal philanthropy. Participant 4 has recently become engaged again and is beginning to think about post-work life and giving back through the university. Lastly, over half of the alumni council members said they stayed engaged because of their experiences as a student. Student experiences mentioned included relationships with professors, athletics, and greek life. Participant 1 said, “the connections I’ve made through the University of Tennessee at Martin have benefitted me throughout my entire career.” All of the alumni said they enjoy remaining connected to the university.

Focus Group Question 2

What are the factors you consider when choosing whether to support UT Martin financially?

The participants’ responses for this question also centered around five themes. The first theme is alumni participants recognize the impact of their financial support, which is a major factor on giving considerations. Two participants mentioned that they knew how much financial

support is needed because of their experiences as involved students. Participant 9 was involved as student with the annual UTM Civil Rights Conference. With her volunteer work during her undergraduate years, she continues to support the conference because she knows the support is going towards an area she is passionate about. Participant 6 mentioned she received scholarships through private donations as a student, and it made a difference to her undergraduate experience. She specifically wanted to help during the COVID years, saying “just because there’s not students in classrooms, it does not necessarily mean they don’t need supported.” She related to the need to be supported during her collegiate years.

The next theme that emerged during this question was the personal ability to give. One participant said she realizes the impact of gifts, but a major consideration is that she personally has the funds to help support the university. She will give when asked if she is able.

The third theme within this section was giving based upon organizational values. These participants mentioned directing their funds to the university and specialized funds knowing the mission of the fund and the university as a whole. Participant 12 stated that her factor of giving includes, “my belief in what the organization stands for...whether I’m giving \$5 or \$500...I have to believe in the mission of what the organizations stands for and what they are doing and how the mission is tied into how they’re helping other people on campus.”

The fourth theme is based upon personal experiences. Participants mentioned they give based on what they were involved with while in school, in their career, or personally see the need to support. Participant 5 mentioned that both her partner and she were graduates of the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. She stated, “we donate every year to the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences because if it had not been for scholarship attained through the department....we probably wouldn’t have been nearly as successful in college.” Other

participants mentioned their participating in athletics and the Civil Rights Conference as motivation to continue to give to UT Martin.

The last theme to emerge from this question was giving is a way to maintain a connection with the university. Not every alumnus can be actively engaged in their alma mater through volunteerism or attending events. Participant 10 said, “ that has [giving] been the easiest way, if you will, to stay connected to the university.”

While each alumnus that was interviewed during this focus group is already an engaged alumnus, it was interesting to note that they are all active donors and have strong opinions on what types of funds they contribute towards. Each one was very specific in where they want to see their gifts used. None of the alumni stated they preferred to give to a general fund.

Focus Group Question 3

Do you have a preference for meeting type, virtual or in-person, and why? If both, also why?

The responses from this question were fairly consistent. Seven out of the thirteen alumni said that their preference depends on the format, purpose, and expectation on the meeting. The themes that emerged were centered around the virtual format, hybrid format, and in-person format. For virtual format, the participants preferred this format for two reasons: convenience and distance to Martin. Virtual meetings do not take as much time out of the day and are preferred for people who can not make it easily to the meeting location, mainly the UTM main campus.

While some meetings are suitable to virtual formats, alumni realize that in-person events and meetings allow for relationship building, reading body language, and forming connections that virtual meetings and events do not. Three of the focus group members (1, 7, and 12) said

they love the personal connection that in-person events and meetings supply. Two alumni (1 and 6) said they only prefer face-to-face interactions and do not prefer virtual meetings or events regardless of the purpose. Participant 1 said it is easy to disconnect with the discussion when in a virtual format because you can mute the volume and turn off the video easily.

Participants also said there are times when online meetings are preferable (such as this focus group) when a very specific topic needs to be discussed quickly. Specifically, they stated they enjoyed coming back to campus for meetings and events. Participant 2 was the only participant who preferred online platforms to in-person meetings. She said she does not feel confined in time, and it allows her to be more flexible since she does not have to travel to the event or meeting.

All participants, except Participant 2, said they realized the value of both formats in specific instances. When initially asked, three of the participants immediately responded with, “depends on the purpose of the meeting.” Participant 12 said, “there’s a certain amount of efficiency that is captured with the virtual format, ... but it’s always best to meet in person and put a name with a face.” Participant 13 said if there is an in-depth conversation where she needs to see the “non-verbal side of individuals”, then in-person is best.

Focus Group Question 4

How would you like to receive information about UTM?

Before discussing this question, the researcher showed the focus group members the list of communication avenues described in Question 19 of the quantitative survey to maintain consistency in answers across research mediums. Out of the options, the focus group participants

mentioned the Campus Scene, Social Media, Email, E-Newsletter, In-Person Information, and Personal Outreach. These selections were used to code question 4.

When asked the question, and after reviewing the communication options, nearly all of the members said they preferred email solely or with another method such as social media. Participant 9 said that digital communication is easier to reference on the go as opposed to the Campus Scene or letter in the mail. Participant 8 said she likes email but is also inundated with emails. She said the email has to be sent from someone in which she is familiar and has to be compelling for her to open and read the information. Several of the respondents also mentioned they use social media for the day-to-day information from UT Martin. While almost all of them mentioned email, they said they frequent social media the most.

Participants 7 and 9 said they enjoyed reading the Campus Scene magazines. Participant 9 in particular said it is nice to sit down with a glass of wine to read through updated news about UT Martin. While the participants mentioned they can glimpse and scan social media or digital communications, they liked to digest the Campus Scene as a whole.

Focus Group Question 5

What attracts you to in-person and/or online opportunities with UTM?

The responses to this question fit into two main themes. First, a third of the responses said they were interested in online formats because of the convenience to attend and participate. These responses were coded either with “fits into schedule” or “informational Zoom.” Participant 10, who lives in another state, said she could participate anytime when it comes to online content. Participant 5 said she can be involved and not have to miss work obligations for

meetings. She also said when it is an informational Zoom with UTM administration and discussion is not needed, it is quicker and more efficient to attend via Zoom.

About two thirds of the respondents said they are attracted to in-person events, especially social events. These responses were coded into the following categories: subject interest, personal ask, visiting campus, and visiting with friends. Participant 10 said anything social or general networking would entice her to come to an event. Participant 9 said she is very likely to attend in person if she is invited by sorority sisters or knows they will also be in attendance. Similarly, Participant 12 said he attends because “I have a lot of fraternity brothers and our kids are now going through the Greek system.” He enjoys coming back to homecoming to catch up in person with former classmates and fraternity members.

Focus Group Question 6

Based on your experience, what are the student factors that affect where an alumnus is involved with UTM?

The concensus answer for this question was involvement in campus life helped determine their involvement as alumni. The responses were coded with the following sentiments about campus life: Greek life, athletics, mentors, personal relationships on campus, other student organizations, and academic experiences. The most important point each made was that they were involved with something that kept them on campus. Participant 1 said, “...when you are engaged with Greek organizations, you have a reason to stay over the weekend and get involved with the university. I think it’s vital to the survival of a rural campus such as UT Martin.” Participant 10 said “when students have those kinds of [academic] opportunities through college, the connections they make just carry on through their professional career.”

Focus Group Question 7

How do you think social media affects alumni participation?

There were various answers to this question. The main theme was that social media helps keep alumni involved and informed. There were three reasons why the participants felt this way. Social media enhances connections, is informational, and makes it easy to connect. Participant 10 mentioned she enjoys feeling like she is participating with the Office of Alumni Relations when the office includes interactive posts on the social media platforms. She specifically mentioned she enjoyed when the office posted two 2022 homecoming shirt options for alumni to vote on, enhancing her engagement. Participant 7 mentioned she enjoys seeing information on former professors or fellow alumni that she knows. Participant 5 mentioned she enjoys seeing event recaps posted on social media for events she was not able to attend. She is able to remain connected even if she was not able to participate.

Focus Group Question 8

What do you believe affects alumni giving?

This question is very similar to question 2 but asks the participants to generally answer what affects philanthropy decisions with the alumni population as a whole. Three main themes emerged from this conversation: impact, passion, and student need.

Alumni want to know that their gifts are making an impact. Participant 5 said, "...getting involved with the alumni council...was what made us take a step back and say, we can do a month here and a month there," knowing where the gifts are going to make a direct impact on students. Participant 13 said, "transparency is the biggest issue or hesitation to get someone to

give.” He stated that he would prefer to give to a fund where he knows exactly how he is making an impact instead of giving to a broad, general fund.

Next, Participants 8 and 13 said they want to give where they “want to create passion and drive.” They want to give to an area they are most passionate about. An undertone to this conversation is that they had previous personal experiences with their preferred giving funds.

The last theme, student need, highlights that these individuals give back to the University of Tennessee at Martin because they know how much students need financial assistance. Many of the alumni received scholarships as students. Participant 11 who was a student-athlete mentioned she needed surgery for an injury while a student at UTM. She said the university helped her financially during that time while she was recovering from surgery. She said if stories like hers were known, she thinks alumni would be compelled to give to support students.

Focus Group Question 9

What methods of communication from the university do you perceive to be most effective?

There were a variety of responses to this question which were coded with the following selections: Campus Scene, handwritten, social media, email, and phone calls, face-to-face, text messages, and a variety of all these. Most participants like to receive information via social media. Five participants mentioned this specially, while two additional participants mentioned that they like to see information from a variety of mediums. Interestingly, Participants 9 and 10 said they like to receive handwritten cards from the university or students. Participant 10 remembers her time as an Undergraduate Alumni Council member and she wrote handwritten notes to alumni donors. She said it was special to write them and now receive them as an alumna.

Participant 1 mentioned that multiple avenues of communication are beneficial because people all have different preferences on how they receive information. He said people consume information at different times and to “throw the kitchen sink at it” in terms of how communication is sent out to alumni. Participant 11 also said, “I don’t think there’s any one stop shop that’s better than the other because you’ve got generational gaps and people consume information in different ways.”

Focus Group Question 10

View the list of preferred types of alumni participation and please tell me which ones appeal to you most and why.

The researcher showed the alumni a list of alumni participation options and asked them to discuss the most compelling selections from the list. This question was coded based upon the following answers: social/networking, young alumni event, volunteer event, gala, reunion event, professional development, industry event, and family friendly event. Nine of the alumni mentioned they enjoyed some type of social event which might include a networking event, business happy hour, or more formal gala celebration. Three of the alumni also mentioned they enjoy reunion type of events such as homecoming or special groups on campus inviting them back for celebrations. Participant 8 said she thinks reunion events are important because it makes people “fall in love” with the campus again while they are visiting. Three other alumni also mentioned they enjoyed attending volunteer events. Participant 11 said she enjoys helping people and she likes events that are not necessarily tied to a speaker.

Focus Group Question 11

What services do you wish for the university to provide to alumni?

This question received a variety of responses, but four main themes emerged from the discussion. Those themes were career services, mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and alumni discount programs.

Participant 9 and 11 mentioned that career service opportunities such as industry events, career networking, and job placement services are an important service the university can continue to provide alumni. Similarly, participant 1 and 4 are interested in professional development and certification opportunities. Participant 1 also said most industries provide professional development opportunities related to the specific job. However, he mentioned the university could provide training for upcoming technologies or information that would affect a wide range of industries. The example he mentioned was Microsoft Excel classes that would benefit a large range of people. Participant 4 mentioned she would enjoy seeing more certification opportunities. During the peak of the COVID pandemic, she utilized quite a few of the continuing education classes to increase her knowledge in her field.

Participants 7 and 10 mentioned they would like to see mentorship opportunities for alumni. The researcher mentioned there is a new services called ConnectUT which is a social media platform that is specifically for this purpose. The participants were not aware of the service, but were very excited it is being offered. Along the same theme, Participant 1 said he liked investing in UT Martin students and exposing them to his network of influence so they can be more successful. Lastly, Participant 7 mentioned he would participate in alumni discounts if they were available to support the university as well as get a discount.

Qualitative Research Question Analysis

Research Question 6

What services do UTM alumni want the university to provide?

Research question 6 is the only purely qualitative research question for this research. This was investigated through the focus group interviews, specifically Question 11. The consensus of responses is that the participants want the university to provide career services, mentorship, professional development opportunities and alumni discounts. Using the coding by variable function within QDA Miner, “professional development” and “career services” were the top services that alumni hope the university continues to provide. See the word cloud with the word frequency presented graphically.



Figure 4.1 Question 6 Word Frequency Word Cloud

Within the “professional development” segment, there was a sentiment that the university could do a better job of communicating the existing professional development opportunities that the university currently provides. For example, Participant 12 stated, “I feel like UT Martin has so many resources, getting that information out to us is, I think, where the gap is.” Participant 13 stated she is “trying to provide some information that we [her accounting organization] have available with different events that are coming up that students would have the opportunity to

participate in as well as professors.” Her sentiment was reflective of asking alumni experts to give back to the university based upon their professional expertise.

Career services was also a leading theme of services requested by alumni. Participant 4 mentioned that job placement services are extremely helpful for new graduates. She also mentioned she wanted a type of job board where alumni could recruit recent graduates to their companies. Participant 10 also wanted career services for young alumni. He graduated during a recession and had a difficult time finding employment in his field. He said he would have benefitted from more job placement support from the university.

Throughout the responses to this question, there is an undercurrent of sentiment regarding the professional development and career services the university supplies. While it was not explicitly stated, there seemed to be an element of trust that the alumni had with the University of Tennessee at Martin. They have a desire to continue relying on the university for continued learning and growth as they move throughout their careers. From job placement services to continuing education, the focus group participants trust the university in the content that they already provide and would take advantage of other services and education if they became available.

Summary

The culmination of the data collection has shown there is significance amongst some of the demographic data points and the preferences between types and formats of alumni engagement. Communication efforts is important to maintaining alumni connections with the university. The survey respondents show preferences for specific types of communication efforts where AROs can help focus their efforts. However, throughout the data collection, it is clear that

many forms of communication and engagement efforts are important to gain the attention of various segments of the alumni population.

Similarly, throughout the qualitative focus group questions, it was clear there was not a single engagement point that gained the attention of all the participants. The theme throughout the discussions was that the alumni were involved somehow as alumni and previously as students. With this focus group, student involvement was important for their continued involvement after graduation. Also, alumni participation through giving and volunteering were a continued theme throughout all the question.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Study and Procedures

Higher education institutions rely on the support of alumni for not only fundraising initiatives but for the global support and promotion of the university (Gallo, 2019). Alumni relations offices (AROs) have expanded the purpose over the lifetime of alumni relations teams from solely fundraising efforts to engagement efforts (Coolman, 2011). Hoyt (2004) explains that alumni must be motivated and willing to give before they make a financial contribution to the institution. Engagement measures such as alumni services, events, and communication methods are essential to maintaining connection with alumni (Levine, 2009). The University of Tennessee at Martin has strived over the past several years to increase engagement opportunities for alumni. The purpose of this study is to learn from UT Martin alumni which engagement opportunities they most prefer to continue developing relationships with new and currently unengaged alumni.

The methods of research for this study were quantitative and qualitative in nature. The first part of this study was a research survey sent to UT Martin alumni in June of 2022. Over 1700 responses were collected from the researcher developed survey, see Appendix B. Once the survey results were viewed, qualitative questions were developed for small focus groups comprised of the UT Martin Alumni Council, Young Alumni Council, and Black Alumni Council. Four focus groups were held virtually during October 2022. The focus group transcripts

were uploaded and analyzed through QDR Miner to identify common themes within each question's responses.

Discussion of the Findings

Research question 1 investigated if there is a relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred formats of alumni programming, either virtual or in-person. Based on the two regression analysis conducted with the virtual engagement preference and in-person engagement preference variables, it was determined that there is a significant relationship between demographic information and preference of in-person and virtual engagement. Once the coefficients were analyzed, it was determined the graduating college did not hold any significance on engagement preferences. Graduation year had a positive correlation with virtual engagement preference and a negative correlation with in-person preference. In other words, the more recent graduates preferred virtual engagement and the older graduating classes prefer in-person engagements as a significant rate. Likewise, location of an alumnus is also a significant predictor of engagement preferences. Based on the coefficient assessment, location had a negative relationship with virtual engagement preference and a positive relationship with in-person engagement preference. This means the farther an alumnus is from Martin, the higher the likelihood that they highly prefer virtual engagement and least likely prefer in-person engagement.

Research question 2 investigated the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred types of alumni programming. Based on chi-square analysis, it was determined that there is a significant relationship between preferred types of alumni programming and demographic

information. Graduation year demonstrated the only relationship with virtual programming. Based on the percentages of alumni that selected each option, it can be concluded that recent graduates prefer more virtual programming over earlier graduates. Based on a chi-square analysis, it can also be concluded that graduation year, approximate distance from Martin, and graduating college are significant predictors of in-person event preferences. Based on the percentages of selections, recent graduates, those closer to Martin, and graduates of the Colleges of Business and Global Affairs and Humanities and Fine Arts are more likely to prefer in-person events.

Research question 3 investigated the relationship between alumni donor status and alumni engagement. A linear regression model was used to determine significance for this question. It can be determined from the regression model and the subsequent post hoc comparisons that the higher the engagement score, the more likely an alumnus will be a donor or make a gift. The qualitative focus groups helped to understand the reasons alumni give back to the university. The three main themes of passion, student need, and impact all point to why engaged alumni continue to support UT Martin. The underlying theme is that alumni are aware of the needs and impact by either student involvement or by communications sent out by university departments of the UTM Office of Alumni Relations.

Research question 4 investigates alumni engagement on types of communications from the university. This question was analyzed using Pearson's chi-square. There were two significant findings of preference of types of communication and alumni engagement: the Campus Scene and emails. It was interesting that social media was not found as a significant type of communication within the quantitative study. However, the qualitative focus groups did mention social media as a main source of information and that it was an important aspect of the

mix of communications that are expected from UT Martin. The qualitative focus groups emphasized the need for a myriad of methods of communications throughout all mediums. While some alumni really enjoy reading the Campus Scene, they also engage daily with social media platforms as their feeds display information about the university, upcoming events, and giving opportunities. It appears through the focus groups that consumption of communication information is a leading factor of alumni engagement, rather than the method of mode of communication.

Research Question 5 investigated the relationship between collegiate experiences and alumni engagement. The quantitative analysis showed a positive correlation between alumni engagement scores and student experiences. If an alumnus was involved with even one student organization, the likelihood of them being involved as an alumnus is higher than if they had not participated in student organization. Based upon the qualitative interviews, the reason that student participation affects alumni engagement is because of the personal relationships that are built during the time as a student. Relationships are the driving connection between the student and alumni experience. Whether the relationships are peers, mentors, coaches, or teachers, making key relationships while a student greatly affects alumni engagement after graduation. Neither the qualitative nor quantitative research made a conclusion about which types of student participation are most beneficial. However, future research would be beneficial.

The final research question, research question 6, was analyzed only via qualitative research. This question investigated the services that UTM alumni want the university to provide to alumni. Career services and professional development were the top requested services. The sentiments for these two services are that alumni see the university as their lifelong education partner. Alumni Council members look to UT Martin when they need additional training that

their professions do not provide. The main barrier to providing the services is making alumni aware of the services. Many of the Alumni Council members were not aware of some of the services that UT Martin and the UT Alumni Association provide.

Recommendations for Future Research

Alumni Relations Offices (AROs) will continue to evolve as the needs of higher education institutions change to meet societal needs. The results from this research make it clear that engagement initiatives are imperative to the health of higher education institutions. As technology changes and evolves, too, AROs will have more, and currently unknown, opportunities for more personalized engagement opportunities. Providing engagement opportunities is clearly critical for the health of higher education institutions. This research focused on the question of in-person versus virtual engagement. Even with all the technology available to AROs, in-person engagement is still vital.

A question that was not specifically addressed in this research is the importance of regional chapter programming. The University of Tennessee at Martin has currently disbanded the chapter programming in favor of staff led regional programming. However, at this time it is still unknown if a formal chapter program would benefit the University of Tennessee at Martin alumni population and engagement opportunities. Future research would be beneficial to determine if chapter programming is a tactic of the past or if it is still relevant today.

Within this research, it is clear that student experiences were important to future alumni participation and engagement. All the alumni council members that participated in the qualitative focus groups had significant student experiences that led to their current alumni involvement. Specific student involvement and experiences were outside of the main scope of this research.

Additional research is recommended to investigate the relationship between specific student experiences, such as Greek life, Student Government Association, and academic organizations, and the future alumni engagement perspective.

The final recommendation for future research pertains to giving appeals. Within this research, communication methods were imperative for continued engagement with the university. Of the communication types, 28% of respondents selected that they prefer postal mail pieces. Besides the Campus Scene magazine, the only postal service mailed pieces that are sent by UT Martin Alumni Relations are giving solicitation appeal letters. Appeal letters continue to be a significant source of donations that are received by the university. However, like other communication efforts, gift solicitations are moving to digital methods. Investigating the preferred types of giving appeals, whether digital or physical mailed pieces, would help to make AROs annual giving practices more efficient and effective, especially if those appeals could be segmented on the demographics that prefer specific appeal types the most.

Recommendations for Engagement Strategies

Based on the varied responses of preference of types of engagement, formats of engagement, and preference of communication styles, a multi-level, complex approach is needed to not only gain engaged alumni after graduation but re-engaged disaffiliated alumni. With multiple generations to consider, a varied approach is essential to a strong pipeline of engaged alumni. The research has provided the information needed to construct a varied approach engagement strategy specific for the University of Tennessee at Martin that could be applicable to other small public universities. Below is a simplified diagram explaining the varied approach,

named the Stratified Alumni Engagement Model. Each tier lists a sample program beneath the category.

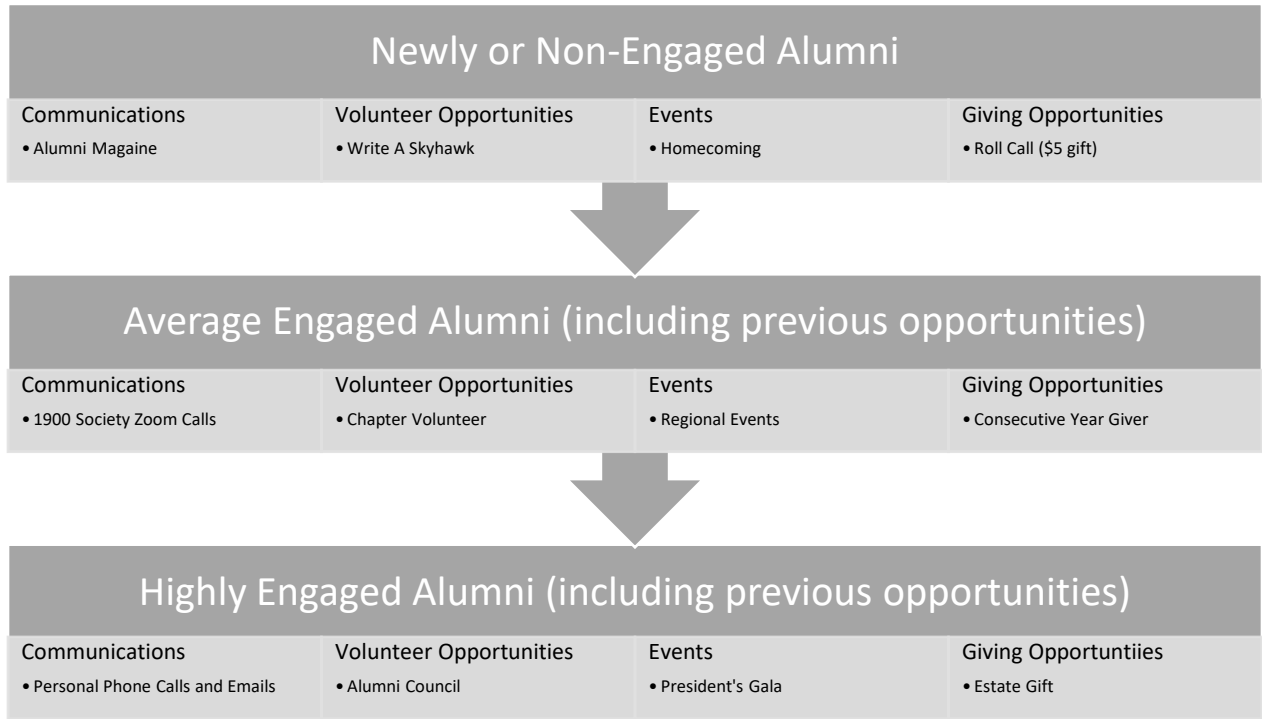


Figure 5.1 Stratified Alumni Engagement Model

The four major efforts of engagement include communications, volunteer opportunities, events, and giving opportunities. The UT Foundation assigns engagement levels for alumni based on inputs of these various engagement opportunities (The University of Tennessee Foundation, 2011a). This research suggests it would be beneficial to offer a wide variety of purposeful engagement opportunities in which each level of engaged alumni could participate. The model in Figure 5.1 visually represents a downward funnel model that entices alumni with simple, quick, and inexpensive ways to participate at the lowest level. As alumni become more

engaged, the model moves to opportunities that are more impactful to the university but require more energy and interest as the model moves to the highest engagement opportunities.

The researcher posits that AROs would benefit greatly from the Stratified Alumni Engagement Model. The model creates a planning tool that AROs can use to ensure they are providing equal engagement opportunities to every engagement level. At each level, alumni are presented with the next level of engagement opportunity in hopes that they continue to move down the engagement funnel to the highest engaged level. As shown in this research study, engaged alumni are more likely to support the university through financial support. AROs are entrusted to maintain and increase alumni engagement for the continued advancement of their higher education institution.

Summary

Higher education alumni relations offices (AROs) are tasked with maintaining relationships with the institution's alumni. Throughout the history of AROs, the purpose has remained the same, while the approach has evolved over time. Technology has specifically changed the landscape of AROs because of the opportunities to reach alumni beyond the traditional method of regional chapter programming. People are inundated with communications and opportunities to become involved with organizations in which they are affiliated. This research studied the preferred formats and types of alumni engagement for the University of Tennessee at Martin Alumni and how this affects alumni giving and engagement level of UT Martin alumni.

This study showed that alumni demographic information presents significant findings related to alumni engagement format and types of engagement preferences. Location and

graduation year present significant findings and should be considered when planning alumni events and engagement opportunities. Communication methods play a significant part in continuing to engage alumni. While the Campus Scene and emails are most preferred, a mix of communication methods is recommended to reach every alumnus on the method of communication that is most accessible and preferred by them.

This research will be used to improve the UT Martin Office of Alumni Relations programming and engagement strategies. Instead of focusing on one method of engagement or communication method, it is imperative to implement the Stratified Alumni Engagement Model to meet the needs and preferences of all demographically different alumni. The UTM Office of Alumni Relations will use this research to continually innovate engagement and communication practices to account for the ever-changing engagement and communication avenues, especially in the virtual engagement and digital communication arenas.

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APPENDIX A

IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Appendix A

Identification and Analysis of Research Questions

Topic: Alumni engagement factors affecting alumni donors in the age of technology

This table may take on a size commensurate with the demands of the dissertation in question. Because some studies may be mixed methods design or you may have differing variables for the research questions, you should complete an analysis for *each* research question.

Insert each research question as it appears in your prospectus/proposal. Begin each with RQ# where # is the number if the research question (1, 2, 3 etc.). You may copy and paste the RQ table as needed.

Quantitative

RQ1: What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred formats of alumni programming, either online or in-person?

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement
Dependent Variable(s)	Graduation year	1940-2022 by decade	Ordinal
	Location	25,50,100, 150, 150+	Ordinal
	Gender	Male, Female, Other (list)	Nominal
	Race/Ethnicity	List of Race	Nominal
	Online Student more than 50%	Yes or No	Nominal
	Outreach Student more than 50%	Yes or No	Nominal
Independent Variables	Preferred Format of alumni programming: In Person	Highly prefer Somewhat prefer Neither prefer nor dislike Somewhat dislike Highly dislike	Nominal
	Preferred Format of alumni programming: Online	Highly prefer Somewhat prefer Neither prefer nor dislike Somewhat dislike Highly dislike	Nominal
Survey Questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18			

RQ2: What, if any, is the relationship between alumni demographic information, including graduation year, location, and academic background, and preferred types of alumni programming? Examples include speakers, volunteerism, continuing education, and career services.

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement	
Dependent Variable	Graduation Year	1940-2022	Ordinal	
	Location	25, 50, 100, 150, 150+	Ordinal	
	Gender	Male, Female, Other (List)	Nominal	
	Race/Ethnicity	List of Race	Nominal	
	Online Student more than 50%	Yes or No	Nominal	
	Outreach Student more than 50%	Yes or No	Nominal	
Independent Variables	Preferred Types of alumni programming	In-Person	Virtual	Nominal
		Student or alumni exhibitions	Student or alumni exhibitions	
		Educational program	Online Book Club	
		Networking event	Educational	
		Professional development	Networking	
		Social event	Prof. Dev.	
		Cultural exhibitions	Social (networking)	
		Volunteer event	Reunion Event	
		Family friendly event	Trivia or game night	
		Alumni Day/Reunion	Alumni achievement award	
		Alumni Achievement Awards	Industry specific event	
		Alumni Event at Conferences	Young Alumni Event	
		Young Alumni Event	Alumni Interviews	
		Students or prospective student event	Cultural exhibition	
Gala or Donor Recognition Event	Gala or donor Recognition event			
Survey Questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 20, 21				

RQ3: What, if any, is the relationship between alumni donor status and alumni engagement?

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement
Dependent Variables	Alumni donor status	Donate to UTM	Nominal
		Do Not Donate to UTM	
Independent Variables	Alumni Engagement	Event attendance	Nominal
		Engaged with social media	
Survey Questions: 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27			

RQ4: What, if any, is the relationship between alumni engagement and preference on types of communications from the university?

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement
Dependent Variables	Preference of communications	Email	Nominal
		Social Media	
		Postal Service	
		Campus Scene Magazine	
		Other	
Independent Variables	Alumni Engagement	Event Attendance	Nominal
		Engaged with social media	
Survey Questions: 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 23			

RQ5: What, if any, is the relationship between student collegiate experiences and alumni engagement?

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement
Dependent Variables	Alumni Engagement	Event Attendance	Nominal
		Engaged with social media	
Independent Variables	Collegiate experiences	Student Government Association	Nominal
		Student Alumni Council	
		Greek Organizations	
		Religious Organizations	
		Academic Organizations	
		Honor Organizations	
		International Travel Study	
		National Travel Study	
		University sponsored athletic team	
		Intramural athletics	
		Housing Events	
Other			
Survey Questions: 12, 14, 15, 16, 23, 24			

Qualitative

RQ 1 (Qualitative): What services do UTM alumni want the university to provide?

Data Point/Element	Source for Data	Data Gathering Method	Data Analysis Method
Alumni perception of current services	Alumni Council Members	Interviews	Phenomenology; analyzing data for common themes
Alumni perception of programming/service needs	Alumni Council Members	Interviews	Phenomenology; analyzing data for significant statements
Alumni perception on online engagement	Alumni Council Members	Interviews	Phenomenology; analyzing data for significant statements
Alumni perception of purpose of alumni relations	Alumni Council Members	Interviews	Phenomenology; analyzing data for significant statements

Attribute Variables:

	Variable Labels	Levels of the Variable	Scale of Measurement	
	Gender	Male Female Other	Nominal	
	Race	Hispanic; American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White; Two or more races (IPEDS)	Nominal	
	Graduation Year	1931-1940	Ordinal	
		1941-1950		
		1951-1960		
		1961-1970		
		1971-1980		
		1981-1990		
		1991-2000		
		2001 -2010		
Student Activities	2011 - Present	Nominal		
	University Sponsored Athletics			
	Greek Orgs			
	Academic Greek Orgs			
	Religious Orgs			
Location	Special Interest Orgs	Nominal		
	Intermural Activities			
	West TN Counties		Counties	
	Middle and East TN Counties		counties	
Socioeconomic Status	Out of State -County touching W. TN	counties	Nominal	
	Out of State – County not touching W. TN	counties		
	Salary Levels	\$0- \$ 25,000		Ordinal
		\$25,001 - \$50,000		
\$50,001 – \$75,000				
\$75,001 - \$100,000				
\$100,001 - \$125,000				
\$125,001 - \$150,000				
\$150,001 - Above				
(The median and average household income of TN falls between the 50-75 range.				
Education Level	Bachelors	Nominal		
	Masters			
	Post – Masters			
	Doctorate/terminal			

APPENDIX B

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH SURVEY

Appendix B

Quantitative Research Survey

Introduction Greetings UT Martin alumni!

You are invited to participate in the UT Martin Alumni Engagement Survey. The survey is being conducted in fulfillment of Jacquelyn Johnson's dissertation research via the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and will be used to add to the alumni relations body of knowledge. The purpose of this study is to investigate the preferred methods of communication and alumni engagement of higher education institution alumni donors in an era with increased social media and electronic communications. While the goal of higher education advancement departments is to raise outside funds for institutions, studies have shown that engaged alumni are more likely to financially support the institution. This study will focus on how alumni of the University of Tennessee at Martin prefer to engage with the university (Coolman, 2011; Kateman, 2015). This study will assist the University of Tennessee at Martin and potentially other higher education AROs in deciding on the most effective engagement programming.

In this survey, approximately (approx. respondents) people will be asked to complete a survey that asks questions about your preference on how you interact with UT Martin. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. It is very important to learn your opinions about how you would like to interact with the university. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this project. Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. You may discontinue the survey at any time. If you do not complete the survey, the data will not be included within the research data analysis. Incomplete survey data will be securely stored but will not be analyzed.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Jacquelyn Johnson at 731-514-9995 or by email at ymf186@mocs.utc.edu. You may also contact the dissertation committee chair, Dr. Elizabeth Crawford, at beth-crawford@utc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Susan Davidson, the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board at 423-425-1387. Additional contact information is available at www.utc.edu/irb.

Thank you very much for your time and support.

This research project has been approved by UT Chattanooga Institutional Review Board. If you consent to move forward with the study, you understand that participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate, please select "yes" below and then "next" to begin the survey.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I agree to proceed with the survey.

Yes (2)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Question 1 What is your gender?

Female (1)

Male (2)

Other: Please list (3) _____

Question 2 Which of the following best describes you?

Hispanic (1)

American Indian/Alaska Native (2)

Asian (3)

Black or African American (4)

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)

White (6)

Two or more races (7)

Question 3 Which year did you graduate?

▼ 2022 (1) ... 1940 (82)

Question 4 Please select the state in which you reside.

▼ Alabama (1) ... Wyoming (50)

Display This Question:

If Please select the state in which you reside. = Tennessee

Question 5 Please select your county of residence.

▼ Anderson (2) ... Wilson (96)

Question 6 Which best describes your approximate distance from Martin, TN?

- Live or work within 25 miles of Martin, TN (1)
- Live or work within 50 miles of Martin, TN (2)
- Live or work within 100 miles of Martin, TN (3)
- Live or work within 150 miles of Martin, TN (4)
- Live or work more than 150 miles of Martin, TN (5)

Question 7 Please select your highest level of education.

- Bachelors (1)
- Masters (2)
- Post - Masters (3)
- Doctorate/Terminal (4)

Question 8 Please select your salary range.

- \$0-\$25,000 (1)
- \$25,001- \$50,000 (2)
- \$50,001 - \$75,000 (3)
- \$75,001 - \$100,000 (4)
- \$100,001 - \$125,000 (5)
- \$125,001 - \$150,000 (6)
- \$150,001 - Above (7)

Question 9 What college does your degree report under? If unsure, please visit <https://www.utm.edu/departments.php>.

- College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences (1)
- College of Business and Global Affairs (2)
- College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences (3)
- College of Engineering and Natural Sciences (4)
- College of Humanities and Fine Arts (5)

Question 10 While enrolled at UT Martin, were you ever considered an on-line student (100% of your classes were online during one or more semesters)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Question 11 While enrolled at UT Martin, did you obtain 50% or more of your degree at a regional center in Jackson, Parsons, Ripley, Selmer, or Somerville?

- No (1)
- Yes, Jackson (2)
- Yes, Parsons (3)
- Yes, Ripley (4)
- Yes, Selmer (5)
- Yes, Somerville (6)
- Yes, multiple Regional Centers (7)

Question 12 Overall, how helpful do you feel your UT Martin degree has been in obtaining your career objectives?

- Not Helpful (1)
- Somewhat Helpful (2)
- No Opinion (3)
- Helpful (4)
- Very Helpful (5)

Question 13 Have you attended an event, committee meeting, or visit to UT Martin since graduation?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Question 14 Have you read or liked/commented on a UT Martin social media post in the past month?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Question 15 On average, how often do you view UT Martin or UT Martin Alumni social media posts? (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, SnapChat, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, or Other)

- At least once a day (1)
- At least once a week (2)
- At least once a month (3)
- At least once every three months (4)

- At least once a year (5)
- Viewed previously, but not within the past year (6)
- Never (7)

Question 16 Which social media platforms do you currently use to view UT Martin campus, alumni, or sports information? (Views can be from the official university accounts, alumni accounts, or other departmental/program accounts.)

- Facebook (1)
- Instagram (2)
- SnapChat (3)
- TikTok (4)
- Twitter (5)
- YouTube (6)
- Other (7)
- None (8)

Question 17 In general, not considering social distant constraints of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, what is your preference for VIRTUAL meetings or events?

- Highly prefer (1)
- Somewhat prefer (2)
- Neither prefer nor dislike (3)
- Somewhat dislike (4)
- Highly dislike (5)

Question 18 In general, not considering social distant constraints of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, what is your preference for IN-PERSON meetings or events?

- Highly prefer (1)
- Somewhat prefer (2)
- Neither prefer nor dislike (3)
- Somewhat dislike (4)
- Highly dislike (5)

Question 19 How would you like to receive information from the UTM Office of Alumni Relations? Select all that apply.

- Email (1)
- Social Media (2)
- Postal Service (3)
- Campus Scene Magazine (4)
- Other (5)

Question 20 Which of the following events and programs would you be interested or likely to attend IN-PERSON at a UT Martin or off-campus location? Select all that apply.

- UTM student or alumni exhibitions (1)
- Educational program (lecture from UTM faculty member or alumna/us) (2)
- Networking event (3)
- Professional development program (resume workshop, mock interview, portfolio review)
- Social event (ex. happy hour) (5)
- Cultural exhibitions (6)
- Volunteer event (7)
- Family friendly event (8)
- Alumni day/reunion (9)
- Alumni achievement awards (10)
- Alumni event at an annual industry conference (11)
- Young alumni event (12)
- Students or prospective student event (13)
- Gala or donor recognition event (14)
- I would not attend any event (15)

Question 21 What types of VIRTUAL events or VIRTUAL programs would you likely attend or participate?

- UTM student or alumni exhibitions (1)
- Online book club (2)
- Educational (lecture from a faculty member on a special topic) (3)
- Networking (4)
- Professional development (resume workshop, mock interview, portfolio review) (5)
- Social (networking) (6)
- Reunion event (7)
- Trivia or game night (8)
- Alumni achievement award presentation (9)
- Industry specific event (10)
- Young alumni event (11)

- Alumni interviews (12)
- Cultural exhibition (music, theater, reading, etc.) (13)
- Gala or donor recognition event (14)
- I would not attend a virtual event (15)

Question 22 What level of commitment or affiliation do you feel when you consider supporting UT Martin?

- I do not feel a level of affiliation which compels me to give to UT Martin (1)
- I feel an affiliation to UT Martin, but do not give or intend to give to UT Martin (2)
- I feel an affiliation to UT Martin and do not give, but intend on giving to UT Martin in the future (3)
- I feel an affiliation to UT Martin and already give to UT Martin (4)
- I prefer not to say (5)

Question 23 What is your feeling of engagement or participation with UT Martin?

- I am highly engaged and volunteer with UT Martin (1)
- I am engaged with UT Martin and would like to become more involved (2)
- I am not engaged with UT Martin, but would like to become more involved (3)
- I am not engaged with UT Martin and prefer not to increase my involvement with UTM

Question 24 What types of organizations did you participate in as a student at UT Martin? Select all that apply.

- Student Government Association (1)
- Student (Undergraduate) Alumni Association (2)
- Greek organizations (3)
- Religious organizations (4)
- Academic organizations (5)
- Honor organizations (6)
- International travel study (7)
- National travel study (8)
- University sponsored athletic team (9)
- Intramural athletics or Campus Recreation activities (10)
- Housing events (11)
- Other (12)

Question 25 If you would consider making a gift to UT Martin, select the types of giving requests that you prefer. Select all that apply.

- Letter appeal via postal service (1)
- Telefund - phone call appeal from a student (2)
- Captain's Challenge - UTM one day-of-giving, social media and online campaign (3)
- Email giving request (4)
- Personal call/visit/email from UT Martin staff member (5)

Question 26 Are you considering making a future monetary gift to UT Martin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Question 27 Please describe why you choose or choose not to attend UT Martin events, read UT Martin communications, or participate in UT Martin alumni activities.

End of Block: Block 1

VITA

Jacquelyn (Jackie) Taylor Johnson grew up in Somerville, Tennessee and is the daughter Rhea “Skip” and Phyllis Taylor. She grew up on a fifth-generation farm and has strong ties to the rural West Tennessee community. She attended the University of Tennessee at Martin where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies in 2008 and a Master in Business Administration in 2010.

She began her career at the University of Tennessee at Martin in the WestStar Leadership Program. Afterwards, she served as the dual enrollment coordinator and then transitioned to the Office of Alumni Relations as the associate director of alumni programming. She currently serves as the assistant vice chancellor of alumni relations and annual giving. In this role, she oversees alumni programming, alumni communications, and annual giving initiatives for the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Jackie resides in Martin, TN with her husband, Chris, and their daughters, Claire and Camryn. She is a member of First Baptist Church Martin and enjoys participating in community activities. She is a founding member of the Weakley County Young Professionals. Jackie is a 2012 honorary graduate of WestStar Leadership and a 2016 graduate of Leadership Weakley County. Jackie received the Weakley County Young Professional of the Year award in 2019 and was a UT Foundation Board of Directors Award recipient in 2022.