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Alumni and named structures: a qualitative analysis of major gift donors

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ALUMNI AND NAMED STRUCTURES:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR GIFT DONORS

By

Allison Cherkosly

A Dissertation
Submitted to The University at Albany, State University of New York
In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Reduced government support has caused higher education institutions to become more dependent on philanthropic contributions. Since the majority of funds come from a small number of donors (Longfield, 2014), it’s important to focus on the highest level of donors. However, there was a lack of research that specifically studied alumni major gift donors who name physical structures with their philanthropic gifts to their alma maters. My intent in developing this study was to fill this gap and help higher education institutions secure more funds.

By building on the research designs of King (2005) and Barascout (2012), I conducted an in-depth case study at one university. I collected data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the specified donors and staff members from the institution. I analyzed this data using an open coding scheme. Consistent with my grounded theory approach, I allowed conclusions to emerge from this data.

My first research question identified the giving motivations of alumni donors who named physical structures with their major gifts to their alma mater. I found twelve overarching factors that motivated these donors: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, g) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, h) Opportunity Cost, i) Warm Glow, j) Legacy, k) Obligation, and l) Tax Implications.

My second research question sought to understand the impact of solicitation processes on the giving decisions of the donor population being studied. I found that four phases of the solicitation processes influenced these donors’ giving decisions: a) qualification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) stewardship.

My study also identified four institutional partners who were involved in the solicitation processes: Development Officers, School Deans, Athletic Coaches, and Current Students.
I also identified two main solicitation process events that influenced these donors: a) fundraising campaigns, and b) campus visits. I found that the donors in my study acted as the “deciders” about their philanthropic gifts, and did not involve their spouses, nor professional advisors in their solicitation processes.

Lastly, my study also revealed that Development Officers seemed unaware of the factors that their respective donors considered when making their giving decisions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I made the decision to pursue my Ph.D. I had no idea how much time, energy, and stress would be involved. Now, more than five years later, I am able to reflect on my time as a doctoral student, and appreciate how much I have grown as a professional and as a researcher. There are numerous people who have supported me throughout this grueling process and, therefore, deserve to be recognized.

Dr. Gilbert Valverde has served as the Chairman of my dissertation committee for over a year. His regular guidance and encouragement made it possible for me to conduct my research and complete a dissertation which I am proud to publish. I have the greatest respect for Dr. Valverde’s academic and research prowess, and have come to think of him as a mentor. Dr. Mitch Leventhal, a member of my dissertation committee, has provided me with the most valuable feedback on all of the drafts leading up to my final dissertation. His clear and pragmatic style of communication made him an ideal committee member. My final dissertation committee member, Dr. Noah Drezner, has provided me with invaluable academic and professional guidance. By drawing on his experiences as a successful fundraising practitioner and philanthropy researcher, Dr. Drezner helped me to design a study that would be valued by the higher education and fundraising communities. I could not have reached this point without these three men, and I am extremely grateful to them for their assistance.

Next, I want to thank the case study institution, the donors, and the Development Officers who participated in my study. It was a pleasure to work with these participants, and I am truly grateful for their involvement.
I am so lucky to have people in my life who have been supportive of my educational pursuits. I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother who was a constant source of love and encouragement. Even when my confidence wavered, my mother’s never did. The rest of my loving family, including my two perfect dogs (Axel Rose and Raja), also deserve my thanks for their unconditional support.

Finally, my best friend, Jake, assumed the role of my “moral supporter” throughout my doctoral studies. I am thankful to him for enduring my stressful moments, and providing me with the necessary motivation to successfully complete my dissertation. I am also grateful to have a friend like Brenda who provided me with the emotional support and comfortable environment to work on my dissertation.

I recognize that I have only reached “the finish line” with the help of these individuals. I am grateful for the opportunity to formally acknowledge them as I complete this endeavor.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Anyone who walks around a college campus in the United States would likely notice buildings, centers, classrooms, and other spaces that bear someone’s name. Many times, these physical structures bear the names of wealthy alumni benefactors. In many cases, these benefactors make large philanthropic gifts in order to pay for a structure to be built. Other times, they secure the naming rights of existing structures. In both scenarios, these donors provide institutions of higher education with a substantial amount of revenue and/or capital. However, there is no research that focuses exclusively on this population.

My study examines the factors that influenced the giving decisions of alumni major gift donors who name physical structures at their alma mater, and the role that their alma mater played in securing their gifts. This information is important because it will provide fundraisers with a greater understanding of the factors that will impact their success, and will give them the opportunity to adjust their fundraising efforts based on my findings. It also has scholarly value in furthering knowledge of philanthropic behavior and the role of philanthropy in higher education.

In order to obtain this information, I conducted a case study at one institution of higher education. I interviewed a limited sample of fundraising staff members and donors meeting specific criteria, detailed in the Delimitations section of this chapter. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain data about how the alumni donors’ named gifts came to fruition. Through a thematic analysis, I determined the factors that influenced donors’ giving decisions, and how the solicitation processes of these gifts influenced those decisions.

This chapter provides an explanation of my research problem, the significance of my study, the research questions and sub-questions that my study addresses, the definitions of terms that will be used, and the delimitations and limitations of my study.
Research Problem

In recent years, fundraising and philanthropy have emerged as important fields of study. This interest stems from the growing need for philanthropic support of higher education institutions due to decreased government funding. Giving can offset some of the declines in tax-funded appropriations (Eicher and Chevallier, 2002). In the United States, state spending on higher education decreased 23% from the 2007-8 academic year to 2013-4 (Mitchell et al, 2014). Often, funds donated by alumni are critically important to an institution because they provide the funding for the margin of success for initiatives that separate institutions from their peers (Leslie et al, 1988).

Donations from individuals, estates, foundations, and corporations reached an estimated $373.25 billion in 2015, setting a record for the second year in a row. Charitable contributions from individuals totaled approximately $264.58 billion, with the education sector receiving the second largest amount of funds- $54.62 billion (Giving USA, 2016). Since the education sector only receives about 14.6% of all philanthropic contributions, there’s an opportunity for educational institutions to increase their market share. Religious institutions and religious causes are the top recipients of philanthropic gifts, receiving more than double the amount of funds that the education sector does. However, contributions to religion have been steadily declining (Giving USA, 2016). This represents an opportunity for educational institutions to capture some of the funds that are no longer being given to religious organizations.

In 2015, charitable contributions to colleges and universities rose to a record level - $40.3 billion (Lederman, 2016) - which is approximately 73.8% of all contributions made to the entire education sector. Approximately $10.85 billion - or 26.9%- came from alumni (Lederman, 2016). Though charitable funds raised for higher education have increased in recent years, the number of
alumni contributing has decreased (Longfield, 2014). Longfield (2014) found that in a fundraising campaign with a goal of raising $1 billion or more, 87% of funds are typically given by 1% of donors. This is different from a “rule of thumb” in the industry known as the “80/20 Rule” (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Weerts and Ronca, 2007). This rule holds that 80% of contributions will come from 20% of the donors. Longfield’s (2014) “87/1 Rule” provides evidence that the trend of increasing funds being raised from fewer people is true. John Lippincott, President Emeritus of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), explains this phenomenon by saying, “the rebounding economy and long-term investment in major gift donors paid off for colleges and universities.”

While there is a large amount of research in the field of philanthropy, there is little research on major donors’ decision-making processes (Barascout, 2012; King, 2005). One of the main topics of development research is donor motivations. These studies examine what factors make someone decide whether or not to give (Panas, 1984; Ostrower, 1995; Rosso, 1991; Burk, 2003; Prince and File, 1994). But it’s not yet understood how these factors influence donors. In addition to deciding whether to give or not, donors must also decide which organization to give to, when to give, how much to give, to which purpose to give, and how to make their gifts.

Cook (1997) found there was an absence of, and critical need for, an empirically-derived and theoretically-driven model of fundraising and philanthropic behavior. Kelly (1991) stated that, “without theory, fundraising is relegated to an occupation without scientific explanation, predictable outcomes, or any claim to professionalism.” In the years since Kelly (1991) and Cook (1997) made these statements, there have been studies that sought to translate their research findings into information that would help industry professionals (Burk, 2003; Burk, 2013; Panas,
2009). But the field of fundraising is always evolving, which means that new research is needed to keep up.

Higher education’s growing dependence on philanthropic contributions in the wake of reduced government support makes higher education philanthropy a topic worth studying. Even though philanthropic contributions (in terms of dollars) have increased to record highs, higher education institutions have an opportunity and need to secure even more funds. In order to raise more money, fundraisers look to scholarly research for insights, frameworks, and tools to help them become more effective and efficient in building mutually beneficial relationships with affluent individual donors (Prince and File, 1994). But there is a significant gap in the literature. There is currently no research that specifically studies alumni major gift donors who name physical structures with their philanthropic gifts to their alma mater. There is also little research that examines donor decision-making processes, and even less that examines the decision-making processes of major gift donors. Since the vast majority of funds come from a small number of donors, it is important to focus research on the largest donors. Much of the current literature provides information on what factors motivate donors to give, but it doesn’t offer a way to leverage this information into successful fundraising outcomes. My intent in developing this study was to have my findings fill these gaps in order to help higher education institutions secure more funds.

**Significance of The Study**

Over the last several decades, philanthropy has become a major focus for researchers. Cook (1997) suggested that one of the goals of research on fundraising is to develop more theoretical bases for predicting and understanding individual giving. Institutions’ abilities to realize their innovative, but costly, strategic goals is directly dependent on their abilities to generate donations from their alumni and other institutional partners (Mann, 2007). Due to this increased need for
charitable contributions, colleges and universities are relying on scholarly research to help them improve their fundraising practices.

Though there has been significant research on philanthropy and fundraising in higher education, there is still a need for research that will contribute to the evolving knowledge and practice of fundraising. Knowledge resulting from research of the factors that contribute to philanthropic decisions provides the fundraising community with a greater understanding of their current and prospective major gift donors. Understanding a variety of motivations for giving is important because it leads to fundraising strategies that are more efficient at targeting and retaining donors (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007). Major gift donors are particularly important to study because of the transformative impact their gifts can have on an institution (Panas, 1984). For some organizations, the amount of a major gift can have a “transformative impact” when the gift allows the organization to do things (such as providing needed services) that it wouldn’t be able to do without the gift. For other organizations, a major gift can be considered “transformative” when it provides something new or improved to the organization that will help it achieve its strategic goals. Once a nonprofit has determined the philanthropic motivations of its most affluent donors, it can then create more appropriate and effective development strategies. Working one-on-one with a donor can also be more effective when a fundraiser clearly understands the donor’s motivations (Prince and File, 1994; King, 2005; Barascout, 2012; Panas, 1984).

The findings of my study should contribute to fundraising researchers’ and practitioners’ knowledge of alumni major gift donors who name physical structures with their philanthropic gifts to their alma maters. There is currently no other research that specifically studies this population, even though these are often the wealthiest and/or most generous donors to higher education institutions.
It is my hope that Development Officers will utilize the knowledge gained from my research findings to adapt their fundraising practices. Greater knowledge about factors influencing donors’ giving decisions should lead to improved fundraising results. Since my research only included one higher education institution and a relatively small number of research subjects, my findings cannot be generalized to the entire research population. However, my findings may be theoretically generalized. In theoretical generalization (also known as “analytical generalization”), researchers develop explanations of the relationships between variables observed in their studies (Sharp, 1998). Such theoretical explanations are supposed to be applicable to the populations on which the studies were based, and can be applied to explain the phenomenon concerned (Tsang, 2013). This means that that Development Officers can gain theoretical knowledge and insights about the type of donors studied, and how their fundraising practices influence these donors.

Research Questions

- **What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?**
  - Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- **What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?**
  - Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?
Definitions of Terms

• “Advancement,” see “Development”

• “Alumni” refers to individuals who have either attended and/or have graduated from an institution of higher education (McDearmon, 2012).

• “Development” is a strategic, integrated method of managing relationships to increase understanding and support among an institution’s key constituents. “Support” mainly refers to philanthropic contributions (Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2017).

• “Development Officer” is an individual primarily responsible to organize and direct programs connected with the fundraising activities of an institution (Higher Education Directory, 2004).

• “Donor” is a person who donates something, especially money, to a charity (Oxford University Press, 2016).

• “Endowment” is an investment fund that offers a reliable source of income to an organization. In traditional approaches, the corpus of a philanthropic gift remains untouched while investment returns are used for a donor-specified purpose at a charitable organization (“Major Gifts and Naming Opportunities”).

• “Front-line Fundraiser,” see “Development Officer.”

• “Fund Development,” see “Development.”

• “Fundraising” is the seeking of financial support for a charity, cause, or other enterprise (Oxford University Press, 2016).

• “Major Gift” is a subjective term. A gift that could transform one organization might be an average gift for another organization (Sternberg and Parkevich, 2009). As it pertains to my study, the term “major gift” was defined by the case study institution. The case study institution classifies a “major gift” as any commitment of $25,000 or more that is paid in full within 5 years of the initial gift commitment.
• “Named gift” is a philanthropic gift given to a charitable organization in exchange for the right to name something either tangible or intangible. This can refer to capital projects, existing spaces or equipment, sponsorships, scholarships, or other endowed funds (“Major Gifts and Naming Opportunities”).

• “Philanthropy” originates from Greece and literally means “love for mankind.” But today, it refers to the “concept of voluntary giving by an individual or group to promote the common good (Glossary of Philanthropic Terms, 2016).

• “Physical structure,” as referred to in this study, includes schools, buildings, centers, rooms, or any other academic or recreational space at an institution.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

**Delimitations**

My research only pertains to institutions and individuals in the United States of America. Philanthropy is an important tradition in the United States. This doesn’t mean that philanthropy isn’t an important part of other cultures, but, Americans donate like no other people. They give more in terms of total donations, per capita giving, size of gifts, and types of giving (Karp et al, 2004).

This analysis can only safely be applied to American institutions of higher education. Higher education institutions are unique and distinctive from other nonprofit organizations. Colleges and universities tend to be much larger than other nonprofits, though this is not always the case. They usually have numerous sources of revenue beyond philanthropy (mainly from tuition) which allows them to invest more resources into their fund development efforts. Other non-educational nonprofits may also have other sources of revenue, including government funds and foundation support. Most higher education institutions have a separate department dedicated to fundraising. In most cases, this department usually includes marketing and communications, researchers, front-line fundraisers, alumni and donor relations, grant writers, and others that support these efforts (Barascout, 2012; King, 2005). Most nonprofits do not have a fundraising
operation anywhere close to this size or sophistication (Ciconte, and Jacob, 2009). In many small nonprofits, there may be only one development professional for the entire organization. Some rely solely on volunteers to raise funds. Lastly, higher education institutions have a significant benefit over other nonprofits because they have an entire base of alumni who know about their organization and what it does. Most other nonprofits do not have this luxury. They must invest significant resources into identifying donor prospects and convincing them of the value of their organization. Therefore, my findings are not generalizable to all charitable organizations.

My study was limited to individual living donors to higher education institutions. It excluded corporations and foundations since they have different motivations and objectives for their philanthropy (Panas, 1984; Ciconte and Jacob, 2009). Foundations - especially those with a national orientation and a large staff - tend to look for experimental programs to support (Panas, 1984, pg. 51). Corporations, on the other hand, tend to give to community programs (Panas, 1984, pg. 71).

While “individual donors” can refer to families of students at the institution, faculty and staff members, and “friends” of the institution, my study only focused on alumni. Alumni are one of the major sources of financial support for their alma maters (Gaier, 2005). The philanthropic motivations and objectives for alumni donors are different from those of non-alumni donors. These alumni are aware of the institution, often benefitted from the generosity of other donors, and may attribute their professional and/or personal success to their college education (Prince and File, 1994). Emphasis on this topic is applicable because gifts from alumni, and through the family foundations managed by alumni, are consistently the single largest source of individual support for colleges and universities (Lederman, 2016).
My study only included gifts made during donors’ lifetimes. While bequests and other planned gifts are a significant source of financial support for colleges and universities, they are very different from outright gifts. Again, the motivations for giving a planned gift are different from the motivations for making a gift during one’s lifetime. Donors often leave bequests to charitable organizations because they don’t want to incur tax consequences (Panas, 1984). Also, a bequest won’t impact a donor’s financial status during their lifetime, which may be more attractive than giving an outright gift while alive. However, some donors also offered various reasons for their preferences for lifetime giving. Some emphasized that they enjoy giving, want to be involved in their philanthropy, and wish to see the benefits that result from their contributions (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 102). Due to the different motivations for giving outright gifts compared to planned gifts, my findings are not generalizable to planned gifts.

I only included major gift donors in my research. Different institutions define “major gifts” differently, which is explored further in the Literature Review chapter. Since I am only using one institution in this case study, the term “major gift” was defined by the case study institution. The case study institution classifies a “major gift” as any gift of $25,000 or more paid in full within 5 years of the initial gift commitment. It is important to differentiate between the studies of major gifts from general studies on philanthropy. Securing each major gift of $100,000 or more usually requires seven to nine face-to-face visits with a donor over a two-year period, at a minimum, while non-major gifts tend to require much less contact to obtain (Cook, 1997). Additionally, the recognition for major gifts is generally much grander than other gifts, which often receive negligible to no recognition. One researcher referred to the dichotomy between annual giving and major giving as “paying your dues versus giving away your surplus” (Jencks, 1987). It takes more effort to convince someone to “give away their surplus” than it does to get them to “pay their
dues,” so the decision-making processes for major gift donors are likely different from those of annual donors.

Lastly, my research only included those major gift donors who named a physical structure, as defined in the Definitions of Terms section of this chapter, in exchange for their major philanthropic gift. Donors can now make a philanthropic gift and, in return, have their names placed on either tangible or intangible items. When donors name tangible items, or “physical structures,” their name will be displayed on the thing that they named. Examples include buildings, rooms, centers, etc. Intangible items, in this context, refer to funds that donors can name. Examples include scholarship funds and endowed professorships. The fund may bear the donor’s name, but their name won’t actually be seen. Since these two types of funds provide different benefits to the donor and the institution, donors likely experience different decision-making processes leading them to name either a tangible structure or intangible fund. My study only focused on the naming of tangible, physical structures, as defined in the “Definitions” section of this chapter. The greatest level of public recognition for donors is obtained through the naming of physical structures. In his interviews with million-dollar donors, Panas (1984) found that it meant a great deal to donors to have others know what they had done. He interviewed a number of donors that had physical structures named for them in exchange for their gifts. Therefore, my findings may not be generalizable to all donors who make named major gifts.

Limitations

The selection of research subjects asked to participate in this study was based on a list of donors provided by the case study institution. The only requirement from the institution was that the donors meet the criteria listed above. Therefore, there may have been unintentional (or intentional) bias affecting the sample. For example, the case study institution may have not
provided an exhaustive list of all donors meeting the criteria discussed in the previous section. The inclusion of research subjects, detailed in the Methodology chapter, was based upon which subjects respond affirmatively to the request to participate. Therefore, there was an inherent self-selection bias.

Second, my study required donors and Development Officers to recall events relating to decisions they made and events that happened in the past. People’s memories can be subject to considerable distortion, and they are apt to recall what might or should have happened, based on their attitudes or beliefs, rather than what actually did happen (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010, pg. 148). There was also a risk that the research subjects wouldn't be truthful during the interviews. Hammersley and Gomm (2008) caution researchers that “what people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked, the conventions about what can be spoke about… by what [information] they think the interviewer wants, and by what they believe he/she would disapprove of” (pg. 100). For these reasons, I chose to interview the donors, as well as the designated fundraising staff members that they worked with during their solicitation processes for their major named gifts. This allowed me to verify the data I collected, and to immediately address inconsistencies.

Lastly, since I conducted a case study at only one institution with a small research sample, my findings won’t be generalizable to other institutions. However, my findings can be generalized in the sense of theory-building, as discussed above in the Significance of the Study section of this chapter. However, a number of other researchers have found consistency in the motivations of donors, regardless of the institutions to which they give (Burk, 2003; Ostrower, 1995; Prince and File, 1994). Other researchers have improperly generalized their findings at one institution to the general population (Holmes, 2009; Gaier, 2005; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995).
My intent was that my findings could contribute to the growing body of literature on major gift donor motivations, and be used to develop a theory of the phenomenon of alumni naming physical structures with major gifts to their alma mater. I rigorously adhered to the strengths and limitations of my study to avoid unwarranted generalizations. I also leveraged my findings to discuss possible contributions to theories that can be subject to testing in the future.

**Overview of Dissertation**

My study is a unique, previously unexplored area that can provide a foundation for future research, and will provide higher education fundraisers with new tools to raise more money from their alumni. It was my intention that my findings would help these fundraisers gain greater insight into the decision-making processes of some of their largest donors, and would help them to develop more efficient strategies for securing donations from these donors.

This chapter provided a justification for my study. The following chapter, the Literature Review, provides an overview of the existing research relating to each of the variables identified in my research questions and sub-questions. The third chapter, the Methodology chapter, details the actions I used to carry out my study. Next, the Data Analysis and Findings chapter, discusses the outcomes of my research, and the themes that emerged through analysis of the data. The final section, the Discussion and Recommendations chapter, provides information about the practical applications of my research findings, and provides recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide justification for my research questions and sub-questions, and methodology. There is a significant amount of literature on philanthropy in the United States. There are also a number of sub-topics in the body of literature on philanthropy. My review of the literature focuses on studies and theoretical works that explain and justify the following research questions and underlined variables:

- **What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?**
  - Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- **What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?**
  - Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?

I organized this chapter based on the logical order of these research questions and associated variables. First, however, is an overview of research on higher education philanthropy in the United States, and the target donor population. Next, I examine the literature on philanthropic motivations, including economic, psychological, and sociological motivations for giving. The final sections focus on the literature related to the second research question and the corresponding sub-questions. By the end of this chapter, the reader should have a comprehensive
understanding of the existing research related to each of the variables referenced in my research questions and sub-questions.

**Philanthropy in United States Higher Education**

Philanthropy has played an important role in the development of higher education (Cook and Lasher, 1996; Sears, 1990; Curti and Nash, 1965). A variety of political, economic, and social factors have led to the transformation of higher education philanthropy in recent years. Governments at the state and federal level have shifted their education funding priorities away from higher education and toward elementary and secondary education (Terry and Macy, 2007; Barascout, 2012). Expenditures for Medicare are the most frequently cited reason for not increasing higher education funding (Cheslock and Gianneschi, 2008). The movement of state support away from higher education represents a shift toward viewing it as a private good, versus a public good. Therefore, the burden of the cost of higher education has been shifted from the government to the consumer (student). With the trend of declining financial support from state and federal governments, higher education institutions are finding that they must develop supplemental revenue streams to maintain institutional survival and growth.

The reduction of funds for higher education in the post-September 11\textsuperscript{th} economy has made philanthropy a higher priority for colleges and universities (Barascout, 2012). The institutions that are successful at raising funds have a competitive advantage over institutions that are less successful.

Since philanthropy is so critical to the survival of higher education institutions, these institutions have had to make significant investments in their fundraising efforts (Harrison et al, 1995). This investment has led to the evolution and sophistication of higher education fundraising, with staff and resources dedicated to the functions of alumni relations, public relations, and
fundraising (King, 2005). The increase and improvement in fundraising efforts have had a significant positive effect on financial results (Ostrower, 1995; Barascout, 2012).

**Major Gifts and Major Gift Donors**

Major gifts are different from other charitable gifts because of their size and their impact. Major gifts are distinguished by their unique capacity to alter the programs, perceptions, and future of an organization. Major gifts are most likely to favor museums, hospitals and medical centers, arts organizations, research institutes, and colleges and universities rather than other types of nonprofits, such as human services and environmental organizations (Caton, 1999, Kelly, 1991, Panas, 1984, and Ostrower, 1995).

Different institutions categorize “major gifts” differently based on the amount of the gift, the timeframe in which the donor pays, and how the donor gives (lifetime giving vs. planned gift). Most higher education institutions with mature fundraising operations classify a “major gift” as a commitment of $100,000 or more, paid over five years during the donor’s lifetime. The two schools included in Barascout’s (2012) study of major gift donors to higher education schools of music classified a major gift as a one-time gift of $25,000 or more. This was also true for one of the colleges included in King’s (2005) study of major gift donors to higher education. One of the other institutions he studied referred to a major gift as a gift of $5,000 or more a year. Regardless of how institutions define them, major gifts still account for a high percentage of private gift totals for most charitable organizations. There is a “rule of thumb” that fundraisers use. It is referred to as the “80-20 Rule,” which states that 80% of the funds raised for an organization come from 20% of its donors. In recent years, many have noticed that a “90-10 Rule” may describe the situation more accurately (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009). Longfield (2014) found that in a fundraising campaign with a goal of raising $1 billion or more, 87% of funds are typically given by 1% of donors. Since
the largest portion of their funds come from major gifts, institutions must invest in their major gifts fundraising programs.

Major gift programs focus on the highest net-worth donors and prospects. Andreoni’s study (1990) suggests that people become less altruistic as income rises from $0 to $100K, and then get more altruistic as income increases above $100K. Institutions seek to take advantage of the philanthropic capacity and inclination of these high net-worth individuals.

There are differences in the way major gifts are raised, compared to annual gifts. Annual giving programs involve a large number of donors and prospects, which requires group analysis. The purpose of annual giving programs is to ensure that the organization has access to expendable funds that they can use each year. Usually these funds are unrestricted and allow the organization to choose how to spend them, which is why they’re so valuable. The major gifts programs, on the other hand, deal with a smaller number of people, which allows for individual attention and interpersonal techniques (Cook, 1997). Major gifts are generally significantly larger than annual gifts and are usually restricted for specific purposes. Annual giving and major giving programs are complementary because major gift donors almost always have a history of making annual gifts to the institution before and after their major gift (Panas, 1984, pg. 52). Cook and Lasher (1996) indicate “the pattern of behavior which colleges and universities try to encourage is to move donors from one level to the next in terms of the size of their gifts and the extent of their involvement in and commitment to the organization/institution” (pg. 42).

Due to the differences between major and annual giving programs, the fundraising activities for major gift donors and prospects are usually different from the activities for annual gift donors and prospects. Annual gift fundraising usually focuses on direct mail/e-mail solicitations, social media engagement, telephone solicitations, and minimal face-to-face
engagement. Major gift fundraising is almost exclusively done through face-to-face engagement. Cook (1997) found that securing each gift of $100,000 or more required an average of seven to nine face-to-face visits with the prospective donor over a two-year period (pg. 8).

Jencks (1987) referred to annual giving as “paying your dues,” versus major giving, which he referred to as “giving away your surplus.” Therefore, the motivations of major gift donors are different from other donors. Major donors may be concerned about the long-term implications of a gift of capital magnitude (Pickett, 1986). A major gift donor views their gift as an investment in an institution, and expects to see a return on their philanthropic investment. A survey by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (2006) found that there were differences between the giving motivations of high net-worth donors (with annual household income of $200K or more, and/or assets in excess of $1M) and lower income donors. Donors at different income levels also provided different responses when asked to identify their single most important motivation for charitable giving (Understanding Donor Motivations, 2009). While this survey studied charitable giving to all organizations (not just higher education), it highlights how donors at different income levels have different motivations for giving. The study also doesn’t differentiate between major givers and annual givers. Therefore, these motivations may not be pertinent to major gift donors in higher education. However, this study does illustrate the fact that higher income individuals think about charitable giving differently than lower income donors.

**Alumni Donors**

Alumni are one of the major sources of financial support for the higher education institutions from which they graduated (Lederman, 2016). Both public and private higher education institutions heavily rely on financial donations from their alumni as a source of budget enhancement (Wunnava and Lauze, 2001). Colleges and universities seek to engage their alumni
in order to obtain financial support from them. Alumni contributions are so crucial that many college rankings, such as U.S. News and World Report, include average alumni giving rates as a factor in their rating schemes. At one time, alumni donations were used for the marginal student who needed scholarships to attend the university or for student organizations to support their travel and activities. Today, alumni donations are an integral part of the budget of a university and necessary for the day-to-day operations (Terry and Macy, 2007; Leslie et al, 1988).

An important characteristic of educational philanthropy is that it allows alumni donors to support the specific institution and/or program from which they benefitted. Ostrower’s (1995) study of elite class donors found that education wasn’t necessarily a philanthropic priority for this group. However, many of them still contributed to their alma maters. Prince and File (1994) characterize many alumni donors as “Repayers” who give to express gratitude for the education that enabled them to achieve success, acknowledges their appreciation for faculty members instrumental in their education, and shows appreciation for relationships with faculty and fellow students alike. Over 92% of wealthy donors interviewed by Ostrower (1995, pg. 87) donated to universities or colleges. Over 57% had made at least one of their largest gifts to higher education, exceeding the percentage for any other area. Of all largest gifts made to colleges and universities, 80.9% went to the schools from which the subjects graduated. The findings from these two studies complement each other. Ostrower (1995) found that donors tend to support the higher education institution that they graduated from, even if they don’t have a specific philanthropic interest in education. Prince and File (1994) built on Ostrower’s (1995) findings in order to understand why donors gave to their alma maters. These studies highlight the importance of alumni donors because of their loyalty to the institutions from which they graduated, and the obligation they feel to give back to those institutions.
**Naming of Physical Structures**

Institutions of higher education are constantly looking for ways to obtain large philanthropic gifts. Offering naming opportunities is one of the tactics that these institutions use to motivate individuals, corporations, foundations, and others to give those large gifts. The success of this tactic is evidenced by buildings, programs, and even entire institutions named for wealthy benefactors. Selling the rights to name institution buildings and equipment has become a staple part of fundraising in higher education institutions in the United States. Naming is attractive because it delivers public recognition of donors’ generosity, in addition to the recipient institutions’ gratitude (Fine, 2008). Since the mid-1990s, the number and dollar amount of naming gifts have increased. Naming philanthropists annually transfer over $4 billion and receive notable naming rights over schools, campuses, buildings, endowed chairs, and a plethora of other facilities and funds (Drennan, 2012).

The naming of tangible and non-tangible items provides donors with a form of public recognition. Organizations can publicly recognize donors in a variety of ways, such as listing donors in a brochure and/or on their website. Philanthropists can also name a wide variety of funds. In higher education, donors often set up endowment funds that bear their names for scholarships, professorships, and specific programs. The greatest level of public recognition for donors is obtained through the naming of physical structures. In addition to school or building naming rights, academic institutions sell a host of interior space naming rights including lobbies, auditoriums, equipment, classrooms, lecture halls, etc. (Drennan, 2012). Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller were pioneers of this type of philanthropy, often referred to as “brick-and-mortar philanthropy” (Gross, 2006). To this day, there are still a significant number of physical structures that bear their names. In addition to the public recognition from having one’s name on a physical space, donors
can also negotiate for additional forms of recognition, such as a plaque and/or portrait, special signage on the façade and/or the interior, appearance of their name on all letterhead and business cards, thanks at the groundbreaking ceremony, press releases, etc. (Drennan, 2012).

The charitable funding of physical structures is a socially beneficial, generous act that society subsidizes with a tax deduction. Drennan (2012) conducted a review of the laws pertaining to charitable naming rights. A philanthropist typically cannot claim a charitable deduction to the extent the philanthropist receives a return benefit from the charity. However, a special tax rule effectively values naming rights at zero, allowing naming donors to deduct the full amount. Anecdotal and empirical evidence demonstrate that in recent years, anonymity for large contributions has become rare, and major donors often acquire contractually enforceable, prestigious naming rights (Drennan, 2012). Drennan (2012) takes the position that part of the gift where the donor receives naming rights should be taxed since they receive a valuable benefit, but I did not find evidence of any bias in his review. He did state that these tax benefits influence the giving decisions of naming donors, but I have not found empirical evidence that specifically supports this claim. I explore this further in the Economic Motivations section of this chapter.

**Philanthropic Motivations**

Why would someone willingly choose to give away their money? Panas (1984) posed the questions: “What motivates large gifts? What are the psychological factors, the pressures, [and] the social imperatives that drive men and women to make gifts of… a million dollars or more?” There’s no simple answer to these questions. While there has been significant research on donor motivations, no study has found one single donor characteristic that solely accounts for a donor’s decision to give or not to give. Rather, there are a multitude of factors that influence every donor’s decision to give (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007; Prince and File, 1994; Ostrower,
1995; Panas, 1984; Burk, 2013). Andreoni (2001) posed the question: “Why would people who work hard for their money simply turn around and give it away?” From the view of an economist, he argues that there are three possible answers to this question, explaining that donors view their contributions: a) as a public good where people support organizations because they recognize society as a whole will benefit from the donation; b) as an exchange where donors give because of the tangible rewards they will receive for their donations; and c) as a warm glow effect where people give because they feel better about themselves for making donations (pg. 1370). The plain fact is that no single factor accounts for donors’ decisions related to their charitable contributions. It is more likely a combination of feelings, timing, past giving experiences, and the motivation and exigency of the moment (Panas, 1984, pg. 7).

Frank (1996) argues that the most effective approach to understand motivations for charitable giving lies in combining two conflicting perspectives: altruism and self-interest. The debate continues about whether “true altruism” exists. Most scholars agree that many philanthropic gifts and prosocial behaviors are motivated by a blend of altruism and self-interested motives. Frantzreb (1997) suggests six kinds of motivations for philanthropy: a) the desire to express faith, b) to express love for one’s fellow man, c) to perpetuate the American dream, d) to help secure or assure, e) to help build, and f) to invest (pg. 69). Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995) found three possible motivations that explain why people give: altruism, reciprocity, and direct benefits. The first motivation states that individuals have altruistic preferences. This may be driven by a social sense of obligation to provide collective goods and services to society, and/or strong feelings of allegiance and empathy toward the organization. The second motivation refers to the belief that the motivation for an individual to make a gift is based on the potential return of some benefit. The third motivation refers to the advantages to growing or improving the brand value and reputation.
of the organization, and any benefits that may come to them as a result. Some researchers suggest that major donors may give based on their personal values, beliefs, ideas, and goals, instead of giving based on the institution’s needs or the needs of the community (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007).

In Prince and File’s (1994) study, they interviewed 476 wealthy donors— an unprecedented large sample— about their motivations for making charitable gifts. Based on their responses, the researchers created seven different profiles and categorized donors accordingly:

- The Altruists *(give because it’s the right thing to do)*
- The Communitarians *(give because they want their community to benefit)*
- The Devouts *(give because they’re devoted to a particular cause or group)*
- The Dynasts *(give because they want to leave a legacy that lasts beyond their time)*
- The Investors *(give because they want an agency to accomplish something)*
- The Repayers *(give because they, or someone they know, benefitted from an agency)*
- The Socialites *(give because they want recognition from their peers)*

These are overarching concepts that seek to explain why someone would choose to make a philanthropic gift. However, they cannot explain how donors make their decisions. When an individual decides to make a gift, there are a number of sub-decisions that need to be made, such as: which organization to give to, how much to give, when to make the gift, and how to give the gift. In terms of understanding donor behavior, Van Slyke and Brooks (2005) claim that there are “triggers” that prompt philanthropic gifts. These triggers are defined as the external activities by organizations that translate the motivations of donors into the desired behavior, typically financial contributions and/or the willingness to volunteer.
The following three sections explore the specific economic, psychological, and sociological motivations that influence individuals’ giving decisions.

**Economic Motivations**

**Financial Considerations and Tax Implications**

Individuals may want to make a philanthropic gift, but they cannot do so without the availability of financial resources. There are a number of financial circumstances that can affect alumni giving. Drezner (2006) conducted research on the relationship between economic cycles and philanthropic giving. He found that giving to higher education is tightly connected to the economy and, specifically, to the stock market. Also, institutions that have alumni with higher average student loan debt have lower alumni giving rates than institutions that have alumni with lower average student loan debt (Terry and Macy, 2007). Student loan debt has a negative impact on personal finances and impedes one’s ability to make a charitable contribution.

The government views charitable giving as “virtuous behavior,” and subsidizes it by allowing donors a tax deduction (Drennan, 2012). While these tax deductions provide a benefit to donors, there is conflicting evidence as to the efficacy of tax deductions to promote philanthropic behavior. Frantzreb (1991) suggests that tax considerations are very seldom the primary reason for giving. Panas (1984) stated, “I am convinced that people do not give for tax reasons, although if there is an advantage, that is helpful” (pg. 50). On the other hand, Holmes (2009) found that wealth, in conjunction with a tax deduction, positively influenced alumni giving. Prince and File (1994) found that tax avoidance alone was a powerful motivator to more than 15% of wealthy donors, and a significant stimulus to their philanthropic behavior. They identified a group of “Investors” as donors who “give with one eye on the cause of the nonprofit and one eye on the personal tax and estate consequences.” These “Investors” apply the same careful analysis to their nonprofit
contributions as they do to any investment. The financial benefits associated with donating sets
the parameters of this group’s philanthropic behavior. While these donors want to benefit society,
their funding decisions take their personal financial situation into careful consideration (pg. 44).
While these researchers disagree about the extent to which tax benefits influence charitable giving,
they seem to agree that donors do not give exclusively to receive tax benefits. Even if an individual
needed a tax deduction which motivated them to make a charitable gift, they would still have to
choose to which organization to give. It is likely that one of the other factors in this Philanthropic
Motivations section would influence that decision.

Prince and File (1994) also found that “Investors” tends to believe that much, if not all, of
the monies they give to nonprofits would otherwise be diverted to government in the form of taxes
(pg. 45). One thing that most researchers agree on is that donors do not want to see their money
go to the government. They view money that goes to the government as being taken away, while
money donated to charity is seen as money given away (Panas, 1984). Wealth that is taxed is
perceived as going to an entity and for purposes with which the donor feels no connection, and
upon which influence cannot be exerted. By contrast, philanthropic gifts permit donors to direct
their funds to institutions and causes with which they identify and which they feel are expressive
of their priorities (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 101).

**Psychological Motivations**

**Appreciation and Obligation**

The literature on “appreciation” and “obligation” motivations for giving seem to be
intertwined. There is little empirical research that specifically addresses “appreciation” as a
motivation for giving. Instead, giving as an expression of gratitude is usually grouped with, and
referred to as, “obligation.”
Panas (1984) and Prince and File (1994) found that donors often feel grateful for the education they received, and credit their successes to their alma maters. Some donors give as a way to express their gratitude for scholarships they received as students which enabled them to attend college. There is clear evidence that some of those who give do so out of a sense of duty and responsibility. Panas (1984) found that donors’ need to share their wealth, through philanthropy, grew in proportion to their own financial growth (pg. 44). King (2005) found that alumni donors’ motivations were largely fueled by their desires to give back to or repay the institution. Revisiting the categories suggested by Prince and File (1994), “Repayers,” who give back because they have received something from the organization, appear to be acutely aware of how others have helped them, and they feel a specific and particular obligation to repay. In the case of higher education, graduates’ feelings of indebtedness and loyalty to their alma maters contribute to sustaining broad support for higher education (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 87). Donors often feel grateful for the education they received, and credit their successes to that education. Some donors received scholarships which enabled them to receive their education. The feelings of gratitude that arise from these scenarios often result in a feeling of “obligation” to give back to the institution from which they graduated (Ostrower, 1995; Mann, 2007).

**Affinity**

One of the most commonly referenced motivations for giving is an affinity for the organization or belief in their mission (Panas, 2009). King (2005) found that the donor-institution relationship is often based on the donor’s undergraduate experiences. His findings complement those of Ostrower (1995). In Ostrower’s (1995) study of wealthy donors, he found that donors who made their largest gift to their alma maters spoke of the enduring, personal relationships they
formed as students. These relationships perpetuated their sense of involvement and attachment to their school (pg. 88).

Researchers have studied the impact of the different aspects of the undergraduate experience on alumni giving. Cascione (2003) found that the donor’s relationship with the institution can be based on the undergraduate or graduate life experience of the alumnus/a, his/her curricular or co-curricular activities, and the impact of scholarships in his/her overall college experience (pg. 40). Cascione (2003) also found that alumni who participated in at least one formal student activity during their undergraduate experiences were 87% more likely to give and 154% as likely to engage with the institution, compared to those alumni who did not participate in any student activities as undergraduates. Mann (2007) found that members who were actively involved during their studies, such as being a member of an athletic team or Greek organization, may develop a strong bond to the college and therefore have a greater propensity to donate. Other researches have reached different conclusions about the impact of membership in a fraternity or sorority on alumni giving. Harrison et al (1995) found that participation in fraternities and sororities is a strong determinant of alumni giving. However, Gaier (2005) found no significant difference in alumni giving based on participation in the Greek system as an undergraduate student. Former athletes have also been found to be more likely to give than alumni who did not participate in sports (Holmes, 2009). Gaier (2005) found that the relationship between alumni involvement and satisfaction with the academic system as an undergraduate was significant. He suggests that university officials need to implement practices that will lead to satisfaction with the academic system in order to increase the likelihood of future alumni involvement.
**Recognition**

The evidence supporting the importance of donor recognition is substantial. In his interviews with million-dollar donors, Panas (1984) found that it meant a great deal to this group to have others know what they had done. He interviewed a number of donors that had physical structures named for them in exchange for their gifts. These donors sometimes felt that their gifts would help inspire others to give.

Prince and File specifically examined the differences between donors’ desires for recognition based on their profile. Most “Investors” (90.6%) rated “individual attention” as very important to them. They have a great respect for money and for the amounts they give away, so they expect their generosity to be acknowledged (Prince and File, 1994, pg. 54). “Socialites” relished public acknowledgement and attention (pg. 64). They want their charities to recognize their special status as major givers (Prince and File, 1994, pg. 66). All of the “Socialites” considered it very important that they be formally honored for their charitable activities. As their giving is a function of their social milieu, they are seriously concerned with validating themselves in this environment (pg. 67). “Altruists,” on the other hand, wanted individual attention from a nonprofit after making a large gift. However, they defined “individual attention” as acknowledgment, appreciation, and respect for their giving, rather than formal public recognition (Prince and File, 1994, pg. 76-7). The rewards and social recognition of giving are not important to the “Altruist” (pg. 79). “Repayers” were found to be the least interested in the attentions of nonprofits. In general, they believe they have already benefited from the relationship with the nonprofit, and as a result, they do not usually seek the additional recognition, status, connections, or benefits often sought by other donors (Prince and File, 1994, pg. 92). In the Alumni Donors section of this chapter, I noted that Prince and File (1994) referenced alumni donors as “Repayers.”
who give back to their alma mater because they are grateful for their education and feel obligated
to give back to the institutions from which they benefited. However, Prince and File (1994) also
say that “Repayers” aren’t interested in recognition. Yet there are many alumni who receive public
recognition by naming physical structures at their alma maters. The most plausible explanation for
this contradiction is that donors give for a multitude of reasons, which is supported by most
research on donor motivations (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007). Many naming
donors likely have mixed motives, joining their quest for public recognition with bona fide
generosity and true appreciation for the mission of their alma maters (Drennan, 2012).

**Warm Glow**

reason, rules” (pg. 50). Andreoni (1989) and Harbaugh (1998b) refer to a sense of self-worth and
internal satisfaction as “personal benefits” that donors obtain from giving. Andreoni (1989) called
it the “warm glow effect.” Barascout (2012) and Panas (1984) found that almost all of their
research subjects expressed some sort of “warm glow effect” from their philanthropy. They stated
that they enjoyed giving, supporting what they are passionate about, knowing they are helping
others, wanting to share what they have, or simply inspiring others to give and understand “how
good it feels” (pg. 88).

Economic analysis of why people give started with the assumption that they do so out of
“pure altruism,” or because they get utility from the level of the public good which their donations
are purchasing. Prince and File (1994) identified a category of donors, known as “Altruists,” who
say that they support nonprofits mainly because it gives their life a greater sense of purpose. They
are fulfilled by giving and they feel that it should be done without thought of personal benefit (pg.
70). Andreoni (1989) showed that a model where giving provided a “warm glow” to givers could
explain facts about giving, such as wide participation across income levels, that the “pure altruism” model could not. Rosso (1991) describes an exchange relationship wherein “the donor brings his or her largess to the program or project,” while “the institution or organization provides the donor with a sense of worth, value, belonging, and making a difference” (pg. 217). Harrison et al (1995) suggests that a potential donor is motivated to give as a result of the impact the gift has on others. The utility that the recipients or beneficiaries of the gift will experience translates into a warm glow motivation for giving.

**Sociological Motivations**

**Making an Impact**

Ostrower (1995) found that philanthropic gifts permit donors to direct their funds to institutions and causes with which they identify and which they feel are expressive of their priorities (pg. 101). The literature suggests that donors are more likely to push their individual priorities than to support institutional priorities. Some researchers suggest that major donors may give based on their personal values, beliefs, ideas, and goals, instead of giving based on the institution’s needs or the needs of the community (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007).

**Engagement**

Researchers have consistently shown that donors choose to make philanthropic contributions to organizations with which they are engaged (Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Cascione, 2003; Burk, 2013). Weerts and Ronca (2007) found that the most giving alumni were not necessarily the best or most engaged students, but instead had developed a sense of commitment and responsibility to the institution over many years of involvement. Individuals who feel a strong connection to an organization provide a rational explanation of why people make donations (Mann, 2007).
One example of engagement with an institution is serving on their Board of Directors, or in another volunteer role. Wealthy donors are most likely to give their largest philanthropic gifts to organizations that they have some other non-donative relationship with, such as serving on the Board or using the organization’s services (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 29). In Panas’ (1984) study of major gift donors, he found evidence that serving on the Board of Directors of an organization provided greater incentive for major giving. He stated that “financial commitment follows personal and direct involvement” (pg. 26). Ostrower (1995) found that wealthy donors were significantly more likely to give to organizations where they were on the Board of Directors or engaged in some other way, and they were likely to give significantly more to those organizations than organizations where they weren’t engaged (pg. 29).

These studies do not specifically focus on philanthropic giving to institutions of higher education. Higher education institutions differ from most other nonprofit organizations because they have a specific group of constituents (alumni) who have some connection with the school. As discussed in the previous section on alumni donors, institutions aggressively try to engage their alumni in order to obtain their philanthropic support.

**Prestige, Social Status, and Elite Culture**

George Bernard Shaw (1896) argued that, “…a millionaire does not really care whether his money does good or not, provided he finds his conscience eased and his social status improved by giving it away…” Major philanthropic giving is a cornerstone of elite culture in the United States, and a mechanism for improving one’s social status. Odendahl (1990) explores the enculturation of the wealthy, and the associated social expectations for philanthropic involvement of members of various groups making up the social and philanthropic elite. A theme that emerged throughout Ostrower’s (1995) interviews with wealthy donors is that philanthropy clearly remains a sign of
prestige among the elite. Philanthropy is a mark of privilege and high social status. Philanthropy allows individuals to signal their success and affluence to their peers. Blau (1964) advances the idea of philanthropy as social exchange and proposes that while the gift passes from donor to recipient, the rewards are bestowed upon the donor not so much by the recipient organization as by the donor’s peers who provide social approval.

Why is philanthropy such an important part of elite culture? The emerging theme from the literature on this topic is that wealthy individuals desire social approval and a sense of belonging from their wealthy peers. Returns to the donor come from fellow members of the elite, who reward him or her for conformity to the norms of the group (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 37). Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that “charitable contributions could be viewed as ‘payments’ in exchange for intangible personal rewards of self-esteem or group membership” (pg. 534). Hollander (1990) found that donors give in order to obtain valued social approval from their peers, and the amount of social approval that they receive is based on the size of their contribution compared to the size of the gifts given by their peers. Prince and File (1994) identify these elite donors seeking social approval as “Socialites.” They express a desire to be constructively philanthropic and are attracted to a particular social milieu which serves as their philanthropic platform (pg. 57). Okunade and Berri (1997) found that the marginal probability of giving to be significantly related to family ties to alma mater and number of other voluntary donors known. While this study doesn’t specifically address donors’ desire for social approval, and is only limited to business school alumni, it does provide an indication that donors want their peers to know about their charitable giving. Donors are not exempt from pressures to give money to charitable causes as a part of their climb to success in the corporate world or as a result of belonging to certain social networks (Ostrander and
Schervish, 1990, pg. 74). Becker (1974) also found that charitable behavior can be motivated by a desire to avoid the scorn of others or to receive social acclaim.

How do these individuals secure the social acceptance that they want? They seek prestige from their philanthropic contributions. Prestige is a critical factor in major gift considerations (Cook, 1997). Harbaugh (1998b) refers to “prestige” as the utility that comes from having the amount of a donation publicly known. The benefit of prestige appears evident when donors aggressively bargain for recognition (Drennan, 2012). Harbaugh (1998a) considered the prestige benefit as a motivation for charitable contributions. His study found that donors have a taste for prestige and that a substantial portion of donations can be attributed to it.

How do members of the elite obtain a prestige benefit from their philanthropic contributions? Prestige is only acquired when the charity publicly acknowledges the donation. The literature consistently shows that this group carefully selects to which organizations they donate based on the prestige benefit that they can derive from doing so. Therefore, the wealthy often choose to become involved with prominent nonprofits which have other members of the elite associated with them. Being identified with prestigious nonprofits serves as a symbol of “having arrived” socially. Prestigious nonprofits can become the target of “social climbing” and networking (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 37). Caton (1999) found that major donors are drawn to institutions with a reputation for quality and seek to associate themselves with the achievement of higher quality in ways that can be appreciated by their peers.

These studies mainly focus on wealthy donors, but they don’t exclusively study major gift donors. Not all wealthy donors give major gifts. Therefore, the motivations identified by these studies can only be generalized to members of the upper class who make charitable contributions, but not to all major gift donors. These studies also research giving to all nonprofit organizations
by the elite, not just higher education. However, Ostrower (1995) found that the bulk of largest gifts from this group were directed toward prestigious educational and cultural organizations that are a part of elite life. Identification with these organizations is a symbol of social standing. Involvement with them brings the donor into contact with his or her social peers (pg. 337, 340-341). Graduates of more prestigious colleges and universities were more likely to have made their largest philanthropic gifts to their alma maters. Among graduates of the most selective institutions, over 57% had made their largest gifts to their schools. The figures drop considerably to just over 15% among graduates of the least selective schools. These figures dramatically illustrate the importance of institutional prestige as an influence on alumni giving. Specifically, graduates of more prestigious colleges are likely to have a greater interest in retaining their connection and sense of identification with their alma mater because they derive gratification from being a graduate of such a prestigious school (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 90).

**Legacy**

Most research on legacy giving is exclusively focused on bequests (Wasley, 2009; Panas, 1984). However, one study by Prince and File (1994) found that some major gift donors often give during their lifetimes to create a legacy that will have an impact that lasts beyond their lifetimes. They characterized these donors as “Dynasts,” and found that they give because it’s a family tradition.

**Development Staff**

The relationships between organizations and their donors have led to more structured fundraising practices at institutions of higher education. The fundraising arm of colleges and universities are often known as Institutional Advancement, or less commonly, Development. Most institutions invest significant resources in their fundraising endeavors in hopes that they will
receive a substantial return on their investment (Cook and Lasher, 1996; King, 2005). Development Officers seek to cultivate strong relationships with potential donors and alumni while promoting the institution through the benefits that derive from its mission (Barascout, 2012). In addition, Development Officers must help donors to understand the potential impact of their giving. Development Officers must also ensure that big ideas live beyond current leadership (Strickland, 2007).

While Development Officers aren’t directly responsible for administering funds, they are responsible for ensuring that donors’ interests are protected so that the funds they give are used in accordance with their wishes. The most common way that development professionals protect donors is by creating gift agreements that explicitly describe how the gifts will be used, who will be responsible for administering the funds, and contingency plans for the gifts if the donor does not donate the full amount that they commit to or if the institution cannot fulfill the donor’s intentions. A significant amount of literature focuses on the role of development professionals and their responsibilities relating to the solicitation processes described in the next section (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Burk, 2013; Burk, 2003).

**Solicitation Process**

The solicitation process plays an essential role in major gift fundraising. The process for soliciting charitable gifts is complicated and requires a strategic approach. Due to the professionalization of fundraising, Development Officers now have access to information focused on donor identification and cultivation, “the ask,” and stewardship (Barascout, 2012; Burk, 2003; Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Panas, 2009). Major gifts fundraising deals with a small number of people, which allows for individual attention and interpersonal techniques (Cook, 1997).
There is some debate among researchers about the number and types of steps in the fundraising solicitation processes. Prather (1981) included five steps in the solicitation process: a) identification, b) cultivation, c) planning the approach, d) solicitation, and e) follow-up. Dailey (1986) identified seven steps in the major gifts process: a) prospect research, b) research and qualification, c) strategizing the approach, d) involving the prospect, e) making “the ask,” f) closing the solicitation, and g) after-solicitation follow-up. Wood (1989) offered a four-step fundraising process of: a) research, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) recognition. He described the major gifts process as 25% research, 60% cultivation, 5% solicitation, and 10% recognition. Steele and Elder (1992) presented a five-step development cycle: a) identification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, d) stewardship, and e) re-solicitation (Cook, 1997). All of these studies advocate for similar steps in the optimal solicitation process- they just categorize them differently. For example, “strategizing the approach,” “involving the prospect,” (Dailey, 1986) and “planning the approach” (Prather, 1981) are incorporated in what Steele and Elder (1992) and Wood (1989) refer to as “cultivation.” One thing unique to the solicitation process developed by Steele and Elder (1992) is that it includes “re-solicitation” as one of the steps. This is important because development professionals seek to develop a life-long relationship between the donor and the institution that will lead to future giving.

There is little in the literature that analyzes the decision-making process of donors in response to “the ask” for a gift (Barascout, 2012). King (2005) identified a “no ask” theme from five of his sixteen research subjects. In each of the five cases, the donor subject stated that “the ask” was of essentially no consequence or had no bearing on their giving. In fact, they stated that they made their gift because there was no ask. Rather, their gift was a natural outgrowth or progression of their relationship with and of their involvement in the institution (King, 2005).
Barascout (2012) concluded that a formal “ask” did not play an important role in soliciting major donors in his study. However, it was not clear whether or not the donors in this study had actually received a formal ask. Without that information, it’s impossible to conclude whether or not “the ask” had an impact on the subjects’ giving decisions. Several other experienced researchers have stressed the importance of “the ask,” citing it as one of the most influential factors in giving decisions (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Burk, 2013; Burk, 2003; Panas, 2009).

**Institutional Partners**

There are a number of people involved with the solicitation process, especially at the major gift level. Panas (1984) stressed the importance of having the “right” person make contact and ask for a gift (pg. 83). Major gift donors expect to be engaged by organizational leadership, particularly the President, and not just a development professional. The President of a college or university will usually only engage with donors at the highest level. Panas (1984) found that major donors typically desire a relationship with the institution’s President or, minimally, to be solicited by her or him. These relationships are considered to be a significant determinant of major donors’ philanthropic behavior (King, 2005; Burlingame and Hodge, 1997). Of the major gift donors interviewed by Panas (1984), the ones who gave gifts of a million dollars or more gave those gifts to institutions and organizations where there was an “unbreakable bond of regard and respect between the donor and the institution’s chief staff person”- there was not one exception (pg. 32-33). In addition to the President and development staff, faculty members and other administrators are often involved in the solicitation process, depending on the donors’ interests.

In addition to staff members being involved in the solicitation process, Board members and other stakeholders are often involved as well. King (2005) found that donor subjects in his study consistently spoke of personal relationships that were either an important element of their
relationship with the institution, or in their giving to the institution (pg. 112). Many of the largest
gifts from wealthy donors went to organizations where the donor had a relationship with another
person who was connected to that organization (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 31). As discussed in the
previous section on sociological motivations, the elite desire social approval and acceptance from
their peers. Panas (1984) found that organizations leverage this motivation by having individuals
who are engaged with the organization ask their peers to give as well. Ostrower (1995) and Burk
(2013; 2003) also found this to be true.

**Incidents and Milestones**

Development Officers invest a significant amount of time and effort into developing
solicitation strategies that are tailored to individual donors. While each development professional
may have anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies, there is no research that
specifically addresses how specific incidents and milestones impact major gift donors’ giving
decisions. For example, a donor may consider an event, such as a class reunion, to be a major
factor that influenced their giving decisions, while the Development Officer may not be aware of
this.

The previous section addresses the involvement and influence of institutional partners. But
there are other people involved in major giving decisions who are external to the institution. For
donors who are married, the key person involved is almost always the donors’ spouse. Panas
(1984) suggested that the role of the donor’s spouse must be considered when assessing a donor’s
potential. He found that husbands and wives give major gifts in partnership. He stated, “A
thoughtful donor will certainly wish to talk to his or her spouse about the gift.” Panas (1984) found
that donors will also consult with an attorney or accountant if they’re considering making a gift of
“major proportions” (pg. 125).
Current research finds that one of the main events that influences giving is class reunions. Researchers have found that the average dollar size increases in reunion years (Gaier, 2005). Gunsalus (2004) and Gaier (2005) found statistically significant increases in alumni giving in the 25th and 50th milestone reunion years. Some professionals feel that the success of institutions’ sports teams can motivate alumni giving. Baade and Sundberg (1996) found that alumni giving increased when the institution’s sports teams were successful, especially in years when they won championships. On the other hand, problems in institutions can have a negative impact on alumni giving. Panas (1984) found that individual donors don’t want to take on controversy, and that controversy negatively impacts the giving of mega-donors (pg. 66).

While development professionals don’t have control over most of the incidents and milestones that may factor into giving decisions, it’s important for them to consider these things and incorporate them into their solicitation strategies.

**Conclusion**

Philanthropy has played an important role in American institutions of higher education. With funding for higher education from federal and state governments declining, and the funding needs of colleges and universities increasing, philanthropic support is essential to the healthy growth and development of institutions. While higher education institutions seek funding from a variety of sources, a large portion of philanthropic support comes from their alumni. Alumni have a pre-existing connection to the institution, which provides colleges and universities with a fundraising advantage that most other nonprofit organizations don’t possess. Ostrower (1995) and Prince and File (1994) examined the giving motivations of the wealthy and found significant evidence of the emotional connection that individuals have with their alma maters. This connection often translated into financial support.
Since philanthropy is often a major source of revenue for higher education institutions, these schools have invested significant resources in their fundraising operations. Development Officers are essential for obtaining philanthropic support, which they achieve through the solicitation process. These professionals develop and execute personalized strategies for their largest donor prospects. In order to build the most effective strategies for donors, development professionals must understand what motivates individuals to make philanthropic gifts and how they make decisions related to their philanthropy.

Researchers agree that the donor decision-making process is complicated and is influenced by a variety of factors and motivations (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007; Prince and File, 1994; Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984; Burk, 2013). There are economic, psychological, and sociological motivations that influence how individuals decide to give money. These motivations, along with internal and external factors influencing the solicitation process, lead the donor to decide whether or not to give, how much to give, which organization to give to, when to give, to which purpose to give, and how to give. Therefore, it’s fair to say that development professionals must take a multi-pronged approach to their solicitation processes in order to effectively leverage each of these factors and motivations.

This literature review has called attention to some of the gaps in philanthropy research. No previous studies specifically address major gift donors who name physical structures with their philanthropic gifts. There are relatively few studies (Burlingame and Hodge, 1997; Panas, 1984; Frantzreb, 1991) that specifically research major gift donors, compared to the studies that include a sampling of donors that give a broad range of gifts (Burk, 2003; Prince and File, 1994; Ostrower, 1995; Gaier, 2005; Mann, 2007). There is a significant amount of literature on donor motivations (Prince and File, 1994; Panas, 1984; Ostrower, 1995; Burk, 2003), but very few studies (Barascout,
2012; King, 2005) focus on the decision-making process of these donors. Some of the most in-depth studies on donor motivations (Prince and File, 1994; Ostrower, 1995) only study wealthy donors. While subjects may be wealthy, they haven’t necessarily given a significant amount of money. I’ve taken this into account while conducting this literature review since it’s important to note that these motivations cannot necessarily be generalized to major gift donors. Lastly, literature on the solicitation process is mainly limited to “how to” books (Dailey, 1986; Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Panas, 2009). The body of literature is missing a key component about how the solicitation process influences donors’ philanthropic decisions. I considered these gaps when designing my study. The following chapter details how the reviewed literature influenced my research design.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

My study researched the factors influencing giving decisions of alumni major gift donors to institutions of higher education who named physical structures with their philanthropic contributions to their alma maters. By building on the research designs of King (2005) and Barascout (2012), I conducted an in-depth case study at one university. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the specified donors and designated staff members at the institution. Using this data, I identified the common factors and influences that addressed my research questions and sub-questions.

This chapter outlines my research questions and sub-question, theoretical constructs, research paradigm, the institution being studied, the population and sample, instrumentation, procedures for collecting data, procedures for treating, coding, and analyzing data, considerations of human subjects, and design issues.

Research Questions

- What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?
  - Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?
  - Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?
  - What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?
Theoretical Constructs

My research questions and sub-questions sought to understand the motivations contributing to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma mater, and how the process of soliciting these gifts influenced those decisions. To understand what motivated this population to name those physical structures, it was first necessary to understand what economic, psychological, and sociological factors impacted their decisions to make these gifts.

Based on the literature review, the main economic construct affecting donors’ decisions had to do with personal wealth, availability of financial resources, and tax considerations. There are a number of financial circumstances that can affect alumni giving. Holmes (2009) found that wealth, in conjunction with a state tax deduction, positively influenced alumni giving. Drezner (2006) conducted research on the relationship between economic cycles and philanthropic giving. He found that giving to higher education is tightly connected to the economy and, specifically, to the stock market. Since economic factors are not the only considerations for this population, my study also examined donors’ psychological and sociological motivations for giving.

Psychologists have studied donor motivations using the lens of conscience and other feelings that are evoked by making voluntary charitable contributions. Frank (1996) argues that individuals are selfish, but occasionally make gestures of selfless kindness. He states that these gestures are based on emotion rather than rationality. Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995) state that individuals have altruistic preferences to their alma maters that may be driven by a social sense of obligation to provide charitable contributions. Emotional attachment and overall satisfaction with the student experience are also significant factors which influence alumni to contribute financially to their alma maters. Graduates leave their college with an assessment of their experience and a
sentiment toward the school. Gaier (2005) found this assessment of satisfaction with the academic system and undergraduate experience is a significant indicator of alumni giving.

Sociologists have also studied how donors’ social behaviors influence their philanthropy. These studies have found that donors often use philanthropy as a mechanism to turn their monetary contributions into valued social approval. Philanthropy is an important part of elite culture and wealthy donors often receive social acclaim and/or acceptance from their wealthy peers (Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984; Ostrander and Schervish, 1990; Odendahl, 1990). Researchers have also consistently shown that donors choose to make philanthropic contributions to organizations with which they are engaged (Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Cascione, 2003; Burk, 2013).

More specific conceptual definitions of the common economic, psychological, and sociological constructs are detailed in the Research Question 1 Analysis section of this chapter.

My second research question sought to understand the influence of the solicitation processes on alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma mater. The solicitation process can include people, such as: institutional leaders, volunteers, and students. According to The Center on Philanthropy (2006), “research shows that high net-worth donors depend on professional fundraisers and colleagues to help them make decisions about their giving.” Rosso (1991) strongly advocated for Presidents, staff leadership, Board members, and volunteers participating in fundraising activities. Fundraisers in higher education consistently work with these institutional partners to solicit major gifts from alumni donors, yet there is no empirical research on the effect of their involvement.

Research is also lacking on the impact of incidents and milestones in the solicitation process. For example, a donor may decide to make a major gift to name a physical structure
because of an upcoming event that will be taking place in that structure, or because of an upcoming event where their gift would receive significant publicity.

Lastly, my study sought to understand Development Officer’s perceptions of the solicitation processes compared to their respective donors’ perceptions. Development Officers spend a significant amount of time planning and executing strategies for the solicitations of high-level donors. While each professional may have anecdotal evidence about the effectiveness of these strategies, there is no research that specifically addresses the major gift donors’ perceptions of these strategies. For example, a Development Officer may have a prospective major gift donor meet with the President of the institution as part of the solicitation process because they feel that it will bring the prospect closer to making a major gift. Meanwhile, the prospective donor may feel that meeting with the President had no impact on their giving decision. Similarly, a donor may consider an event, such as a class reunion, to be a major factor that influenced their giving decision, while the Development Officer may not have the same opinion. My study examined the motivations and influences leading to donors making major gifts to name physical structures at their alma mater, but also sought to assist Development Officers by identifying how donors’ perceptions of their solicitation processes differed from their own perceptions.

**Research Paradigm**

My research design was based on the designs used in Barascout’s (2012) and King’s (2005) studies. Barascout (2012) and King (2005) conducted grounded theory studies where the research questions and designs were directed toward generating a theory of some process. This strategy of inquiry is most helpful in instances when current theories about a phenomenon are either inadequate or non-existent (Creswell, 2009, pg. 130). As discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review chapters, very little research exists on the decision-making processes of major
gift donors, and no literature exists on the motivations of donors who name physical structures with their major gifts. Therefore, it was most appropriate to let a theory emerge from the data, rather than imposing an initial theoretical framework in my study.

A grounded theory approach was the best way to approach my study because I collected a significant amount of data through interviews with research subjects, and initially imposing only certain theoretical frameworks would have inhibited my ability to draw meaningful conclusions from the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that “the theory that emerges from the researcher’s collection and analysis of qualitative data is in one sense equivalent to what he knows systemically about [the] data… By the close of the investigation, the researcher’s conviction about his own theory will be hard to shake… This conviction does not mean that his analysis is the only plausible one that could be based in his data, but only that he has a high confidence in its credibility” (pg. 225).

I chose to pursue a case study approach to answer my research questions. According to Yin (2003) a case study design should be considered when: a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions, b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study, c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, and/or d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. A case study approach was appropriate for my study because it met most of these conditions. First, though my research questions do not begin with “how” or “why,” I sought to understand why subjects made the giving decisions that they did, and how the solicitation process influenced their gifts. Second, it wasn’t possible for me to manipulate the behaviors of research subjects since their inclusion in my study was predicated on them exhibiting the behavior that I am studying. Third, contextual conditions were relevant to the phenomenon I studied. Contextual conditions are the
“specific set of conditions that intersect dimensionally at [a] time and place to create a set of circumstances or problems to which persons respond through actions/interactions” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pg. 132).

Barascout (2012) and King (2005) conducted multiple case studies as part of their dissertations. I wanted to build on their research, but to obtain more in-depth information from donors and staff members. I did so by adapting their data collection processes, outlined in the Procedures for Collecting Data section of this chapter, and by using a more thorough coding scheme, outlined in the Coding Process section of this chapter. Therefore, it was important for me to conduct a more focused study at one institution, rather than a less-focused one among multiple institutions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010, pg. 137). This had a minor impact on generalizability, detailed further in the “Design Issues” section of this chapter. However, since there is no research on this topic, my study will provide a foundation for other researchers to conduct more generalizable studies on this population and this phenomenon in the future.

Throughout this case study, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each donor research subject. I also interviewed designated staff members from the case study institution in order to provide additional context for the circumstances surrounding each subject’s major named gift. The semi-structured interviewing method is more flexible than a structured one and “it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee’s responses” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, pg. 88). It is also important to collect multiple forms of data in order to ensure the validity of my study (Creswell, 2009, pg. 190). People’s memories are subject to considerable distortion and are apt to recall what might or should have happened, based on their attitudes or beliefs, rather than what actually did happen (Leedy and
Ormrod, 2010, pg. 148). By interviewing multiple people for each gift being studied, I was able to mitigate some of the weaknesses of this case study approach.

**Institution Being Studied**

I conducted this case study at a public, degree-granting institution of higher education in the United States. According to its Carnegie Classification, the case study institution is a four-year, large, highly residential, doctoral research university. The case study institution has a dedicated fundraising division, which is part of its affiliated Foundation. This Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation organized for the purpose of encouraging philanthropic contributions in support of the activities and programs of the case study institution. It is run by a President, also known as the Vice President of University Development, and reports directly to the President of the case study institution.

The President of the Foundation granted approval for me to conduct my study at the case study institution, and entered into a Letter of Understanding (Appendix A) on behalf of the University. I was then directed to work with the Assistant Vice President of University Development who manages the case study institution’s fundraising operations.

**Population and Sample**

**Description of Population**

The research population consisted of individual living alumni of the case study institution who made at least one major gift during their lifetime in order to name a physical structure at their alma mater.

**Rationale**

My study was limited to individual donors. It excluded corporations and foundations since they have different motivations and objectives for their philanthropy (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009;
Panas, 1984). While individual donors can include family members of students, faculty and staff members, and “friends” of the institution, my study only included alumni. The philanthropic motivations and objectives for alumni donors are different than non-alumni donors.

It is important to separate the study of major gifts from general studies on philanthropy because of the uniqueness of major giving. Fundraising for major gifts is much more personalized to each prospect’s needs and desires, and requires a strategic approach involving many different parties (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Burk, 2003; Panas, 1984). Therefore, my study only focused on donors who had made at least one major gift to the case study institution. While bequests and other planned gifts can often be referred to as “major gifts,” they are different from outright gifts. Again, the motivations for giving a planned gift are different from the motivations for making a gift during one’s lifetime (Ostrower, 1995), which is why my study only included donors who made outright major gifts.

**Sampling**

I worked with the Vice President and Assistant Vice President for the fundraising division at the case study institution to identify the population of donors who met the following criteria:

1) Be a living alumnus/a of the case study institution

2) Be a donor who made a major gift (defined below) with the explicit understanding (defined below) that a “physical structure” (defined below) would bear their name
   a. “Physical structures” include the following: schools, buildings, centers, rooms, or any other academic or recreational space at an institution
   b. “Explicit understanding” means that there was an agreement between the donor and institution, prior to the donor making their gift commitment, that the donor would receive the naming rights of the particular physical structure in exchange for their gift.

3) Made the major gift during their lifetime (no bequests)
   a. “Major gift,” as defined by the case study institution, refers to a commitment of $25,000 or more that is paid in full within 5 years of the initial gift commitment
The Assistant Vice President provided an exhaustive list of donors meeting these criteria, which consisted of thirteen donors/named spaces. Once these donors were identified, I met with the Development Officers at the case study institution who had worked with these thirteen donors on their named gifts being studied. During this meeting, I explained the purpose of my research, reviewed the list of potential subjects, and requested that the Development Officers allow their respective donors to be contacted about participating in my study. The Vice President and Assistant Vice President requested that three donors not be contacted because they were working with these donors on large gifts and did not want to risk jeopardizing the donors’ relationships with the case study institution. These three donors were immediately removed from the sample population, leaving ten potential research subjects.

I scheduled phone meetings with the Development Officers who worked with each of the remaining ten donors. During these calls, I obtained approval for each donor to be contacted about participating in my study. The Development Officers and I agreed upon individual plans for recruiting each donor. These plans are explained in the Procedures for Recruiting Participants section of this chapter. Ultimately, seven donors agreed to participate in the study.

**Sample Description**

The research sample was made up of seven donors to the case study institution who were selected through the process outlined in the previous section. Donors were not asked to disclose any demographic information except for their gender and marital status. The respective Development Officers provided background information related to the charitable giving of each participant to the case study institution. The information provided by the Development Officers was related to the gifts being studied, including: the sizes of the gifts, the purposes of the gifts, and the timing of the gifts.
Six of the seven research subjects in this study identified themselves as male, and one identified as a female. Six of the seven donor subjects identified as married, and one identified as single/never married. This information is based on the self-reported demographic data provided by donor participants, but was also verified by their respective Development Officers.

The size of the gifts ranged from $25,000 (the minimum standard to be considered a “major gift” at the case study institution) to $100,000. Three of the seven gifts were for $25,000 each. Two gifts were for $50,000 each. Lastly, the remaining two gifts were for $100,000 each. Donors were given the option of paying their gift commitments over multiple years, but no more than five years. All seven donors took more than one year to pay their full commitment. One donor paid over two years. Three donors paid over three years. The remaining three donors paid over five years.

All gifts were given for the purpose of naming a physical space at the case study institutions. One donor’s gift was used to name a Center. One other donor’s gift was used to name a laboratory. Three donors’ gifts were given to name teaching spaces (classrooms). Lastly, the remaining two donors used their gifts to name administrative spaces (conference rooms).

All seven gift commitments were made between 2007 and 2014 (between three and ten years before the case study start date). Five of the seven gifts were made as part of a campaign organized by the case study institution, while the other two gifts were made outside of a specific campaign.

I interviewed four male Development Officers and two female Development Officers during my study. At the times of their interviews, the Development Officer participants had all been continuously employed by the case study institution’s Foundation for between four and fifteen years.
Procedures for Collecting Data

Procedures for Recruiting Participants

I intended to follow the same procedures for contacting my sample as Barascout (2012) and King (2005). However, after the meetings with Development Officers, it became clear that it would be more effective to revise this process, and personalize it based on each donor’s relationship with their respective Development Officers.

The Development Officers were provided with a Letter of Introduction (Appendix B). The purpose of this letter was to introduce me to each research subject, to encourage them to participate in my study, and to inform them of my process for following up with them on their interest in participating in the study. It also assured subjects that their personal information would not be shared with anyone other than me, and their anonymity would be maintained throughout my study. All of the Development Officers felt that mailing this Letter of Introduction would be too impersonal because the potential subjects were major donors with whom the Development Officers had significant personal relationships. Therefore, all of the Development Officers elected to reach out to the potential subjects via phone or e-mail to convey the message of the Letter of Introduction, without being as formal and impersonal. Of the ten donors who were contacted, seven expressed an interest in participating in my study. The Development Officers working with these seven donors then introduced me to the donors via e-mail. Of the remaining three donors, two declined to participate, citing time restrictions as the reason that they were not interested in participating. The final donor in the sample could not be reached by the Development Officer.

Once the Development Officers introduced me to the individuals interested in participating in my study, I responded to the donors by thanking them for their interest. I attached the Donor Consent Form (Appendix D) to my e-mail responses and asked each donor to carefully review it,
and then offered to schedule a call with the donors to answer any questions they had about participating. All sever donors responded to that e-mail by saying that they did not have any questions and that they were attaching a signed copy of the Donor Consent Form. Once I received the signed Donor Consent Forms, I proceeded by scheduling a mutually convenient time with each donor to interview them by phone.

Upon scheduling a date and time for donors’ phone interviews, I would notify the respective Development Officers via e-mail, and request to schedule a time for me to interview them prior to their donor’s interview. I attached the Staff Consent Form (Appendix E) and Staff Interview Protocol (Appendix G) to the e-mail. I informed each Development Officer that they needed to provide a signed copy of the Staff Consent Form prior to their scheduled interview. I also requested that each Development Officer complete the first two sections of the Staff Interview Protocol prior to their scheduled interview. The reason that they were asked to provide this information in advance of the scheduled interview was because the requested information was objective, and may have required the Development Officers to search their fundraising database for the information. All Development Officers provided their signed Staff Consent Forms prior to their scheduled interviews. Approximately half of the Development Officers provided the information requested in the first two sections of the Donor Interview Protocol prior to their scheduled interviews. For those Development Officers who did not provide the requested information, I posed the questions during their interviews. This added approximately five to ten minutes to the interview because it required Development Officers to search their fundraising database and personal records to obtain the requested objective information.
Procedures for Administering Instrument

Donors and staff members included in my study were each asked to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured phone interview. I chose to administer this type of instrument because, “it offers researchers the opportunity to uncover information that is probably not accessible using techniques such as questionnaires and observations” (Blaxter et al, 2006, pg. 172).

Unlike Barascout’s (2012) and King’s (2005) research, I interviewed the Development Officers prior to interviewing their corresponding donors. I made this change for several reasons. First, I anticipated that the donors would have a limited amount of time for interviews. Wealthy, high-level donors tend to be extremely busy. Both Barascout (2012) and King (2005) noted that many donors they contacted about participating in their studies were concerned about the amount of time the interview would take. By interviewing staff members first, I obtained background information about the donors, rather than using the time in their interviews. Second, Barascout (2012) sent donors the transcripts of their interviews and asked them to review them, and provide clarification where necessary, yet none of the subjects responded. This indicated that it is more effective to ask the donor for clarification during their interview. By interviewing staff members first, I could detect discrepancies during my interviews with donors, and ask for clarification immediately.

Additionally, unlike Barascout’s (2012) and King’s (2005) research designs, my interview protocol for the designated staff members (Appendix G) obtained specific information about each of the research subjects. Barascout’s (2012) interview questions asked for the designated staff members’ input on the general fundraising efforts of the institution, their own personal perceptions about working with major gift donors, and the organizational structure of their fundraising operations. My interviews with staff members were intended to provide context surrounding the
individual major named gifts from each of the donor participants. Specific information about the instrumentation is provided in the following section.

A reminder e-mail (Appendix C) was sent to each participant two days prior to their scheduled interview. At the end of each interview, I requested participants’ mailing addresses, which all interviewees willingly provided. A hand-written thank you note was mailed to each donor participant (Appendix H) and staff member participant (Appendix I) within one day of completing their interview.

**Instrumentation**

I used a semi-structured interview protocol for both donors and staff members. This type of interview involves open-ended questions that are few in number and are intended to elicit in-depth views and opinions from each of the participants (Creswell, 2009, pg. 181). The questions in semi-structured interviews are comprised of a core question or questions, and additional associated questions related to those central questions (Creswell, 1998). In this type of data collection, the interviewer can refocus the interview subject towards the research topic if they start to deviate from the main issue (Gray, 2009). By using a semi-structured interview protocol, I was able to obtain a significant amount of pertinent information from subjects. A structured interview protocol would not have provided enough flexibility to obtain the information necessary to answer my research questions.

Each interview was audio-recorded and professionally transcribed in its entirety to facilitate accuracy and completeness of the information provided by each participant. I also added to the interviews by using reflective memos, which contained my “speculations, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, pg. 121).
While the staff and donor interviews were semi-structured, I developed central guiding questions which would elicit the information required to answer my research questions. Figures 1 and 2 below outline the rationale for each interview question in the Donor Interview Protocol (Appendix F) and Staff Interview Protocol (Appendix G), respectively.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?</td>
<td>(Q1) Let's begin with you telling me about your relationship with [CSI] after you graduated in [Graduation Year].</td>
<td>(Q1) This question is nearly identical to the first question posed by King (2005) and Barascout (2012). Significant research finds that donors make philanthropic gifts to organizations with which they’re engaged (Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984). Other literature stresses the importance of a strong relationship between the donor and the recipient organization (Cascione, 2003; Mann, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?</td>
<td>(Q2) Can you share your philanthropic history with the school? (2a) What factors motivated you to start/continue/change your giving? (2c) What programs/causes have you given to at [CSI]? Why? (2c) What did you hope to achieve and/or get in return for your gifts?</td>
<td>(Q2) The purpose of these questions was to pinpoint the factors and motivations leading to donor subjects’ decisions to start, stop, increase, and decrease their giving to the school. Donors have to make a conscious choice to begin, end, or change their giving to an organization. Therefore, it was important to identify what decisions were made by each subject, and what factors and motivations led them to make these choices.</td>
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</table>
(Q3) You generously named the [PS]. Please talk me through how this gift came to be, from start to finish.

(3a) When did you first hear about this naming opportunity? When did you first start to consider it? Which came first and how much time passed in between?

(3b) Were you given other choices for things to support with your contribution? If so, why did you choose this one?

(3c) Did you decide how much you were going to give, and then determine what you could support for that amount of money? Or did you determine what you wanted to support first, and then decide how much you would give?

(3d) What made you decide to make the commitment at the time you did?

(3e) Did [CSI] ever ask you to make a gift of this size and/or purpose that you previously declined? If so, why did you decline? What made you change your mind?

(3f) What would you say were the reasons that you made this gift?

(Q3) There are a number of decisions that donors need to make each time they make a gift. For example, donors must decide when to make the gift, how much to give, and how they would like their gift used. It was important to understand how they arrived at their decisions. For example, donors often decide how much money they are able to give away at the end of the calendar year once they review their end-of-year finances. They may also consider how charitable giving can influence their tax return at that time.

Some sub-questions, such as 3f, asked donors to identify the factors influencing their giving decisions. But others, such as sub-question 3c, were less direct and allowed more leeway to interpret subjects’ responses. This sub-question provided information about the economic factors influencing donors’ decisions, but also provided additional information about what psychological and sociological factors were factored into their decisions.

Sub-question 3e was designed to pinpoint a specific scenario where the subject previously declined to make a gift that they later granted to the same institution. King (2005) referenced this concept in his final research report, though this question was not part of his donor interview protocol. Understanding what led a donor to say “no,” and then to say “yes” to amajor gift, was intended to provide valuable insight into donors’ decision-making processes since something specific had to change in between these decisions. It could simply be a change in the subjects’ financial capabilities, or something more complex.
| Q4 | Please tell me about your relationships with the [CSI’s] development staff and leadership (President/Cabinet/Deans).

   (4a) How did these people influence your decision to name [PS]?

Q5 | What made you decide to make this type of gift to [CSI] instead of another nonprofit organization?

   (5a) Have you made gifts of similar significance to other organizations?

| Q4 | These are some of the most common staff members involved with major gift solicitations in higher education. These relationships are considered to be a significant determinant of major donors’ philanthropic behavior (King, 2005; Burlingame and Hodge, 1997). Therefore, it was important to understand how subjects’ giving decisions were influenced by their relationships with institutional partners.

Q5 | One of the most fundamental philanthropic decisions donors must make is about where to give their money. Understanding what influences donors to give to one organization over another can provide valuable insight into the decision-making processes of these donors. Sub-question 5a was intended to add perspective to subjects’ interviews by understanding their previous philanthropy. For example, if a subject had made multiple major gifts to other organizations before making their gift being studied, they might not put as much thought into their giving decisions. However, a subject who had never made a major gift might put much more thought into their decisions. Since this was not the topic of study, there was little value in expanding beyond this one question, unless a subject’s response prompted further questioning related to the topic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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| 2) What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater? | (Q1) Let’s begin with you telling me about your relationship with [CSI] after you graduated in [Graduation Year].  
(a) Were there any people who were key in facilitating your relationship with the school? What was your relationship with them? What was their relationship to the school?  
(Q2) Can you share your philanthropic history with the school?  
(2a) What factors motivated you to start/continue/change your giving?  
(2b) How did [CSI] get you to start/continue/change your giving?  
(2c) What programs/cause have you given to at [CSI]? Why?  
(2d) How did [CSI] show their appreciation for your giving? | (Q1) King (2005) and Barascout (2012) posed similar questions in their interviews of higher education major gift donors. The question yielded helpful information for King (2005) who found that an interpersonal relationship with someone engaged with the institution was a catalyst for subjects’ philanthropic giving. Therefore, understanding who was key in facilitating subjects’ relationships with the school provided insight into the role of institutional partners in the solicitation process.  
(Q2) It’s particularly important to understand the evolution of subjects’ philanthropy to the school. Starting, continuing, and changing giving behavior requires a choice by donors, and a follow-up action based on that choice. In order to understand the subjects’ decision-making processes, it's necessary to understand the role of the case study institution, and how the case study institution influenced subjects' philanthropic decisions.  
Sub-question 2d specifically asked about the case study institution’s stewardship of subjects. Stewardship of donors is an important component of solicitation processes, and often sets the stage for future giving (Prince and File, 1994; Steele and Elder, 1992). When a donor feels that their gift was appreciated, they may be more inclined to make another gift to the organization. However, if a donor doesn’t feel that their gift was appreciated, they may not make another gift to the organization (Burk, 2003). Therefore, it was important to understand if the subjects felt that their philanthropic gifts were appreciated, and how that influenced their future giving decisions. |
c. What differences exist between the development officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?

(Q2) What events/circumstances/people do you feel acted as catalysts for your giving and/or positively impacted your desire to give to [CSI]? What events/circumstances/people do you feel inhibited your giving and/or negatively impacted your desire to give to [CSI]?

(Q3) You generously named the [PS]. Please talk me through how this gift came to be, from start to finish.

(3a) When did you first hear about this naming opportunity? When did you first start to consider it? Which came first and how much time passed in between?

(3b) Were you given other choices for things to support with your contribution? If so, why did you choose this one?

(3d) You could’ve made this gift at any time. What made you decide to make the commitment at the time you did?

(3e) Did [CSI] ever ask you to make a gift of this size and/or purpose that you previously declined? If so, why did you decline? What made you change your mind?

(Q3) Donors need to make decisions about to which organizations to give, where to designate their contributions, when to make their gifts, and how to give. This question, and sub-questions, were intended to elicit information about how subjects made these decisions in relation to the major named gifts being studied. These questions were designed specifically to gain information about the case study institution’s actions, and how those actions influenced subjects’ giving decisions.
(3g) What was the nature of your spouse’s involvement in this process? What did your spouse think about making this gift?

(3h) Did you consult anyone else throughout this process?

(3i) Who asked you for this gift? How would you describe your relationship with this person?

(3j) How did the following factors influence your philanthropy to [CSI]: a) economic considerations, b) connection to the school as a student and/or alumnus/a, c) emotions, d) institution’s efforts, e) and receiving tangible/intangible benefits?

(Q4) Please tell me about your relationships with the university’s development staff and leadership (President/Cabinet/Deans).

(4a) How did these people influence your decision to name [PS]?

Sub-questions 3g, 3h, and 3i, were intended to gain information about who was involved with the solicitation processes of the major named gifts being studied, and the role that those individuals played in subjects’ giving decisions. Panas (1984) found that husbands and wives give major gifts in partnership. This is why it was important to understand the role of subjects’ spouses in their giving decisions. Panas (1984) found that donors will also consult with an attorney or accountant if they’re considering making a gift of “major proportions” (pg. 125). Knowing who influences donors’ giving decisions can be valuable information. Therefore, this was important information to obtain from subjects.

Lastly, sub-question 3j was intended as a follow-up question, in case subjects hadn’t provided this information during their other answers. Based on the current literature, these are some of the most common motivations and factors influencing donors’ philanthropic giving decisions.

(Q4) Since relationships with these staff members are often a key factor in donors’ giving decisions (King, 2005; Panas, 1984), it was important to understand the role that they played in those decisions.

The sub-question was intended to provide information specific to the research sub-question about the involvement and influence of institutional partners in the solicitation process.
| (Q5) What made you decide to make this type of gift to [CSI] instead of another nonprofit organization? (5a) Have you made gifts of similar significance to other organizations? | (Q5) This question sought to understand how the case study institution was able to get subjects to make the major named gifts being studied to their organization over a different organization. The institution could’ve had a significant influence over this giving decision, or the donor could’ve decided on their own to give to this organization. |

*CSI*= Case Study Institution

*PS*= Physical Structure

***3rd SUB-QUESTION OF 2nd RESEARCH QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY COMPARING STAFF AND DONOR INTERVIEW RESPONSES***
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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</table>
| 1) What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters? | (Q1) Please provide me with some information about the donor’s relationship with [CSI]
   (1a) What volunteer roles/committees have they served on? | (Q1) This question provided context for the ensuing discussion of subjects’ philanthropy to the school. Research has found that individuals’ relationships with charitable organizations influence their charitable giving to those organizations (Mann, 2007; Ostrower, 1995). It was also important to know about subjects’ engagement with the school because it may motivate charitable giving. Research shows that donors make philanthropic contributions to organizations with which they are engaged (Burk, 2013). |
| | (Q2) Can you tell me about this donor’s philanthropic history with the school?
   (2a) When and why did they start giving?
   (2b) How did their giving change over the years?
   (2f) Did the donor ever have any objections to giving?
   (2g) What projects/causes did the donor give to? Why? | (Q2) This question sought to understand the motivations and factors leading to subjects’ giving choices. Donors have to make conscious choices to begin, end, or change their giving to an organization. Therefore, it was important to understand what factors and motivations lead to these choices. Major gift donors almost always have a history of making annual gifts to the institution before and after their major gift (Panas, 1984, pg. 52). Therefore, it was important to pinpoint the factors and motivators that led donor subjects to increase, decrease, start, and stop their giving. |
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<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>2) What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?</td>
<td>(Q3) Please talk me through the process, from start to finish, about how the gift that named [PS] came to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1a) What volunteer roles/committees have they served on?</td>
<td>(3d) Did any “negotiations” take place between [CSI] and the donor about the amount/timing of the gift, what they would receive in exchange, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1b) Have they attended events or class reunions?</td>
<td>(3e) What impact do you think the following factors had on the donor’s decision to make this gift: a) economic considerations, b) connection to the school as a student and/or alumnus/a, c) emotions, d) institution’s efforts, and e) receiving tangible/intangible benefits?</td>
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<td>(1c) Do they have relationships with current or former staff/faculty members, university leadership, or other alumni?</td>
<td>(Q3) Staff members were to provide insight into the factors and motivations that influenced donor subjects’ decisions to make the major named gifts being studied. This is why it was important to solicit their opinions on their solicitation processes.</td>
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Sub-question 3d pertained to the actual solicitations of the major named gifts being studied. Donors and institutions are often in agreement about the broad concept of a proposed gift. However, there are details that must be worked out between these parties. It was important to understand what details needed to be negotiated, because it could provide insight into donors’ motivations. For example, if a subject insisted on their name being displayed more prominently than the institution intended, this may imply that the subject was motivated by public recognition of their philanthropy.

<table>
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<th>Question 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Q1) Please provide me with some information about the donor’s relationship with [CSI].</td>
<td>(Q1) Barascout’s (2012) study showed that, without exception, the major gift donors he interviewed all had a relationship with the organization to which they donated. Donor engagement with an organization is often a sign of a significant donor-recipient relationship. Ostrower (1995) and Panas (1984) found that donors were most likely to give their largest gifts to organizations which they serve on the Board of Directors. These questions uncovered information about donors’ engagement with the school, and how fundraisers utilized this information in their solicitation strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1a) What volunteer roles/committees have they served on?</td>
<td>Fundraisers often develop solicitation strategies around events because they can provide an opportunity for recognition of donors. Researchers have found that the average dollar size increases with reunion years (Gaier, 2005). Sub-question 1b sought to obtain information relating to donors’ involvement with class reunions and related philanthropy.</td>
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<td>(1b) Have they attended events or class reunions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1c) Do they have relationships with current or former staff/faculty members, university leadership, or other alumni?</td>
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<td>Question (Q2)</td>
<td>Text</td>
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| a. Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters? | (Q2) Can you tell me about this donor’s philanthropic history with the school?  
(2a) When and why did they start giving?  
(2b) How did their giving change over the years?  
(2c) When and why did the school identify this person as a potential major donor?  
(2d) How did the school get the donor to increase their giving?  
(2e) Who was involved in the fundraising process with this donor?  
(2f) Did the donor ever have any objections to giving?  
(2g) What projects/cause did the donor gave to? Why?  
(2h) Did the donor ever receive any benefits or recognition for their giving? What was it?  
(2i) Had the donor ever been asked for major gifts before? |
| b. What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters? |
| c. What differences exist between the development officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process? |
| (Q2) It is rare that someone’s first gift to an institution would be a major gift. Major gift donors almost always have a history of making annual gifts to the institution before and after their major gift (Panas, 1984, pg. 52). Therefore, it was important to pinpoint how institutional fundraising efforts influenced donor subjects to increase, decrease, start, and/or stop their giving. Cook and Lasher (1996) indicate “the pattern of behavior which colleges and universities try to encourage is to move donors from one level to the next in terms of the size of their gifts and the extent of their involvement in and commitment to the organization/institution.” This means that the institution is responsible for moving donors to higher levels of financial support. Development Officers often have to overcome objections from donors in order to become (or stay) a beneficiary of their philanthropy. If fundraisers cannot overcome these objections, they will often lose these donors. Therefore, it was important to understand what objections each donor subject had, and how the institution overcame them, which was addressed in sub-question 2f. |

Sub-question 2i focused on subjects’ decisions about whether or not to make a philanthropic gift to this institution. King (2005) referenced this concept in his final research report, though this question was not part of his staff interview protocol. Understanding what led a donor to say “no,” and then to say “yes” to a major gift, provided valuable insight into donors’ decision-making processes.
(Q3) Please talk me through the process, from start to finish, about how the gift that named [PS] came to be.

(3a) Who was involved with this process? Who asked for the gift?

(3b) **(If married)** Was the donor’s spouse involved in the process?

(3c) When and how was the naming opportunity presented to the donor? Why did the school introduce this giving option?

(3d) Did any “negotiations” take place between the school and the donor about the amount/timing of the gift, what they would receive in exchange, etc.?

(3e) What impact do you think the following factors had on the donor’s decision to make this gift: economic considerations, connection to the school as a student and/or alumnus/ae, emotions, institution’s efforts, and receiving tangible/intangible benefits?

(Q3) It was important to interview a designated staff member at the case study institution about each solicitation process of the major named gift being studied because the staff member was able to provide the most accurate information about these solicitation processes. Most of these sub-questions were related to who was involved with the solicitation process, how they were involved, and why they were involved.

Sub-questions 3d and 3e were more subjective. Sub-question 3e was intended to elicit the staff members’ opinions about the influence that their efforts had on donor subjects’ giving decisions, while sub-question 3d focused on the institution’s involvement in the actual solicitations of these gifts.

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* CSI = Case Study Institution
* PS = Physical Structure

*** 3rd SUB-QUESTION OF 2nd RESEARCH QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY COMPARING STAFF AND DONOR INTERVIEW RESPONSES***
Procedures for Treating, Coding, and Analyzing Data

I conducted my study using a grounded theory approach, which means that the data led me to the theory, rather than the other way around. Therefore, I remained open to all possible theoretical directions, and this openness is reflected in my procedures for treating, coding, and analyzing the data I collected.

Data Treatment Procedures

Immediately upon completion of each interview, I sent the audio-recorded interview file to an independent third-party company for professional transcription. Once I received the completed interview transcript, I read the transcript while listening to the corresponding interview audio-recording to ensure accuracy. Minor corrections were made to the transcripts, but there were no major discrepancies.

I then e-mailed each interview transcript to the corresponding participant and asked them to review their transcript and notify me if they had any recommended revisions. Only one participant responded to this request and asked to add a total of three sentences to his response to one question. The additions did not provide any additional relevant information to my study. All other interview transcripts remained unchanged.

Coding Process

For my coding method, I used an open coding scheme (also referred to as “initial coding”). This initial coding scheme is intended as a starting point to provide the researcher with analytic leads for further exploration and to see the direction in which to take the study (Glaser, 1978, pg. 56). Open coding is breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, pg. 195). I applied this coding scheme to the interview transcripts of each of the research subjects. The nature of my
grounded theory study led me to exclude grammatical, affective, literary and language, and procedural methods of coding. I chose to pursue elemental coding methods since they have basic, but focused, filters for reviewing the corpus, and they build a foundation for future coding cycles (Saldana, 2013, pg. 83). Of the elemental coding schemes, open coding was the most likely to effectively organize and analyze the data I collected in order to answer my research questions. Saldana (2013) claims that open coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies (pg. 101). Barascout (2012) also used similar data analysis procedures, though he did not reference or describe any specific coding scheme.

For the first level of coding, I read each section of donors’ interview transcripts, and coded them based on whether they addressed my first research question and/or second research question. This initial step was intended to break down the large amount of data into organized, manageable parts. The data addressing the first research question was coded as “Motivations” and data addressing the second research question was coded as “Solicitation Process.”

I first addressed the “Motivations” data aimed at answering my first research question. To answer this question, I needed to address its sub-question by identifying the economic, psychological, and sociological motivations of donor subjects. During the proposal stage, I developed a list of anticipated codes based on the relevant literature. The definitions for these codes are included in the following sections of this chapter. I used these codes to create an initial list of “nodes” in NVivo. As I went through the initial coding process, it became evident that additional codes/nodes were needed. These codes were defined and added to the node list.

I coded the interview transcripts sentence-by-sentence, and applied the appropriate code or codes to each sentence. If back-to-back sentences were part of the same thought and code, I coded them as one reference.
Upon completing the first round of coding, I re-read the references within each code to ensure appropriate alignment with the code definitions. While reading these references, it was clear that additional levels of coding were needed within several codes, which are discussed in the following sections. I repeated this process of coding until I could identify distinct, fundamental themes within each code.

To address my second research question, my first step was to code the interview transcripts from Development Officer subjects. Similar to the first step with the donor interview transcripts, I identified the references associated with the “Solicitation Process” code.

My second research question contained three sub-questions that needed to be answered. Therefore, the next level of coding was based on the variables in the first two sub-questions: “Institutional Partners,” and “Incidents and Milestones.” These definitions are discussed in the Research Question 2 Analysis section.

Upon completion of this coding process, I re-read the references within each code to ensure appropriate alignment with the code definitions. While reading these references, it was clear that additional levels of coding were needed within each of these two codes. I repeated this process of coding until I identified distinct themes within each code.

To answer the third sub-question of the second research question, I compared the coding from donors’ interview transcripts to the coding from their corresponding Development Officers’ interview transcripts. For each Development Officer-Donor pairing, I made a list of every similarity and every difference between their transcripts. After completing this process for all seven pairings, I read through each list of similarities and differences. While doing this, I was able to identify overarching categories. I created new lists for each category and separated the
similarities/differences from the previous step into the appropriate category. I read through the items within each category and identified emerging themes from that data.

At the end of this section, Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the outlined coding process.

**Research Question 1 Analysis**

My first research question sought to understand the motivations of alumni donors who made major gifts to their alma mater in order to name physical structures. Based on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, I expected that the donors in my study would cite certain factors influencing their decisions to make these gifts. I listed these factors as initial codes in NVivo, but I remained open to identifying new codes and eliminating nonapplicable codes throughout the entire data analysis process.

I added four unanticipated motivation codes during the coding process: “opportunity cost,” “appreciation,” “making an impact,” and “legacy.” The reasons for these additions are explained within each corresponding section below.

For each code listed below, I denote which type of motivation it represents (economic, psychological, or sociological).

**Financial considerations (Economic)**

Numerous researchers have studied the impact of financial considerations on philanthropic giving. It stands to reason that a person cannot give away what they do not have. Individuals may want to make a major gift, but they cannot do so without the availability of financial resources. There are a number of financial circumstances that can affect alumni giving. For example, Drezner (2006) conducted research on the relationship between the economy’s cycles and philanthropic...
giving. He found that giving to higher education is tightly connected to the economy and, specifically, to the stock market.

I coded any references to availability of financial resources, financial obligations, or the economy as “financial considerations.”

**Opportunity Cost (Economic)**

Rational actors will weigh the costs and the benefits of different alternatives, and will choose the decision that maximizes the positives and outweighs the negatives (Ostrander and Schervish, 1990). In the case of philanthropy, the cost is fairly straightforward—the amount of the monetary contribution and the opportunity cost of not using the money for an alternative purpose. Ostrower (1995) found that donations are influenced by the availability and desirability of alternative options for disposing of wealth.

“Opportunity cost” was an unanticipated code. The existing philanthropy research did not address donors’ perceived opportunity costs of giving. Rather, the literature seems to assume that there is always an opportunity cost of giving, so it doesn’t need to be explicitly addressed. Therefore, I did not initially create a code for “opportunity cost.” However, as I was interviewing donors, it became clear that the opportunity costs of giving factored into their giving decisions. Since my study sought to understand the giving decision-making processes of these donors, I created an “opportunity cost” code.

I coded references as “opportunity cost” when subjects discussed their choices about giving to the case study institution compared to spending that money in an alternative way.

**Tax Implications (Economic)**

Throughout Ostrower’s (1995) research of wealthy donors, it became clear that donors do not want to see their wealth going to the government through taxes, and that philanthropic
contributions provide a way for donors to avoid taxation (pg. 100-101). Holmes (2009) concluded that wealth, in conjunction with a state tax deduction, positively influenced alumni giving. However, Panas (1984) found that people do not give for tax reasons, although if there is a tax advantage, that is helpful (pg. 50). He states, “passion, rather than reason, rules.” Drezner’s (2006) stance isn’t as absolute as Panas’, but he does concede that human behavior is complex, and it is impossible to truly know how much giving is done to avoid taxes and how much is based on a form of altruism, and how much is a combination of the two.

I coded any references to taxation, positive or negative, as “tax implications.”

**Appreciation (Psychological)**

Panas (1984) and Prince and File (1994) found that donors often feel grateful for the education they received, and credit their successes to their alma maters. Some donors give as a way to express their gratitude for scholarships they received as students which enabled them to attend college.

“Appreciation” was an unanticipated code. The existing philanthropy research doesn’t make a distinction between “appreciation” and “obligation” motivations for giving. Rather, these two motivations are usually simply referred to as “obligation.” For this reason, I had only anticipated the need for an “obligation” code. However, during my data analysis, I recognized that there was a need to separate these two motivations. Donors who clearly referenced “obligation” as a motivation for their giving talked about feeling indebted and/or feeling required to give. On the other hand, donors also talked about how thankful they were for the case study institution, and how their gifts were intended to demonstrate their appreciation. Therefore, I created a code for “appreciation” that was separate from “obligation.”
I coded references as “appreciation” when subjects talked about their giving as a result of gratitude, regard, or thankfulness toward the case study institution.

**Affinity (Psychological)**

“Affinity for the recipient institution” was the most common theme in both King’s (2005) and Barascout’s (2012) studies. In their studies, nearly all research subjects cited an affinity for the institution to which they were donating as a factor in their decisions to make major gifts. Gaier (2005) found that alumni develop their relationships with their schools while they are students and that they graduate with an assessment of their experiences and sentiments toward their alma maters. Graduates’ dispositions toward their relationships with their alma maters influence their future decisions on their giving and involvement with those institutions.

I coded any references to subjects’ relationships with and/or positive feelings toward the recipient institution as “affinity.”

**Recognition (Psychological)**

The evidence supporting the importance of recognition of donors is substantial. In his interviews with million-dollar donors, Panas (1984) found that it meant a great deal to this group to have others know what they had done, which resulted from public recognition of their donations. Prince and File (1994) also found that recognition was important motivator for many types of donors.

References were coded as “recognition” when subjects discussed wanting/not wanting public recognition/acknowledgement for their gifts, and/or how this factor impacted their giving decisions. Donors’ inclusion in this study was predicated on them naming physical structures, so references to the naming rights of these structures were not automatically coded as “recognition.”
Obligation (Psychological)

Panas (1984) found that givers feel a duty and responsibility to “pay back” by making philanthropic gifts (pg. 43). Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995) state that individuals have altruistic preferences to their alma mater that may be driven by a social sense of obligation to provide charitable contributions. Ostrower’s (1995) study of wealthy donors found that many wealthy donors view giving as an obligation of the privileged (pg. 36).

I coded references to giving being a requirement or responsibility, or a desire to repay the case study institution as “obligation.”

Warm Glow (Psychological)

Andreoni (1989) referred to “a sense of self-worth” as a personal benefit that donors obtain from giving. He called it the “warm glow effect.” Harrison et al (1995) suggest that a potential donor is motivated to give as a result of the impact the gift has on others. The utility that the recipients or beneficiaries of the gift experience is what directly influences the donor to make the gift.

I coded references about a desire to have an impact on others, feeling good from giving, or a sense of self-worth as “warm glow.”

Making an Impact (Sociological)

Gainpaulsingh (2009) found that donors are increasingly looking to do something more transformational or on a larger scale. They want their philanthropic contributions to drive more permanent change. This impact-motivated giving is referred to as “transformational giving.” While this is a relatively new concept, past research has recognized that donors may give out of a desire to affect a nonprofit organization and/or an issue. Ostrower (1995) found that philanthropic gifts permit donors to direct their funds to institutions and causes with which they identify and which
they feel are expressive of their priorities (pg. 101). The literature suggests that donors are more likely to push their individual priorities than to support institutional priorities. Some researchers suggest that major donors may give based on their personal values, beliefs, ideas, and goals, instead of giving based on the institution’s needs or the needs of the community (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007).

“Making an impact” was an unanticipated code. This is because the most current literature on “transformational giving” only refers to “transformational gifts” as large, multimillion-dollar donations. Since the gifts in my study were significantly smaller than this threshold, I did not anticipate that they would have a large enough impact to factor into donors’ giving decisions. However, as I interviewed donor subjects, it became evident that they did wish to have an impact with their contributions, even on a small scale. Therefore, I created a code for “making an impact.”

I coded references as “making an impact” when subjects explained what they wished to accomplish at the case study institution with their gifts, and/or when they referred to things that could be affected or altered as a result of their contributions.

Engagement (Sociological)

In Panas’ (1984) study of major gift donors, he found evidence that serving on the Board of Directors of an organization provided greater incentive for major giving. He stated that “financial commitment follows personal and direct involvement” (pg. 26). Ostrower (1995) found that wealthy donors were significantly more likely to give to organizations where they were on the Board of Directors or engaged in some other way, and they were likely to give significantly more to those organizations than organizations where they weren’t engaged (pg. 29).

I coded any references to volunteering, serving in a leadership role, or participation in institutional activities as “engagement.”
**Prestige/Signaling wealth/Social Status (Sociological)**

Harbaugh (1998a) considers the prestige benefit as a motivation for charitable contributions. His study found that donors have a taste for prestige and that a substantial portion of donations can be attributed to it. In Ostrower’s (1995) study of major gift donors, he found a major theme that emerged throughout his research—philanthropy clearly remains a sign of prestige among the elite (pg. 36). He also found that donors derive personal prestige from association with institutions that are prestigious in the eyes of their peers (pg. 90).

Giving can also serve as a signal of wealth or reliability (Harbaugh, 1998b). The association between philanthropy and privilege means that philanthropic involvements are viewed as symbolic of the donor’s personal success and affluence (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 36). Harbaugh (1998a) found that a donor’s prestige benefit may depend on how their reported donation compares to donations by others.

Philanthropy is often viewed as a mark of privilege and high social status. It is a part of elite standing, which is perceived as one of the defining characteristics of being upper class (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 36). Donors are not exempt from pressures to give money to charitable causes as a part of their climb to success in the corporate world or as a result of belonging to certain social networks (Ostrander and Schervish, pg. 74). Philanthropy offers a mechanism for people to transform private goods into social approval. Hollander (1990) offers a model of social exchange in which cooperative behavior is motivated by the expectation of emotionally prompted social approval. These emotions seem to be part of genetic hardwiring that humans are interested in being the objects of others’ positive emotions.

I coded any references to a desire for respect or admiration, peer pressure, desire to belong to a group, or social approval as “prestige/signaling wealth/social status.”
**Legacy**

Prince and File (1994) found that some major gift donors often give during their lifetimes to create a legacy that will have an impact that lasts beyond their lifetimes. They characterized these donors as “Dynasts,” and found that they give because it’s a family tradition.

“Legacy” was an unanticipated code. The existing philanthropy research only refers to the legacy motivation when talking about bequests and planned gifts. Since my study only included gifts made during donors’ lifetimes, I did not initially create a code for “legacy.” As I was interviewing donor subjects, I recognized that some of them viewed the naming of physical structures as a vehicle for establishing a legacy. Since there is no research that specifically studies donors who name physical structures, I did not know that I would need to create a code for the “legacy” motivation until I began interviewing these donors.

I coded references as “legacy” when subjects expressed a desire for themselves and/or their families to be remembered, through their named structures, after their deaths.

**Research Question 2 Analysis**

My second research question sought to understand how the solicitation processes of alumni major gift donors’ named gifts influenced their giving decisions related to those gifts. This is a developing area, so relatively little research exists on solicitation processes and “asks” (Burk, 2003; Panas, 2009). Burk (2003; 2013) advocates that solicitation processes and asks have a stronger impact on donors’ giving decisions than any other factor. Ciconte and Jacob (2009) also recognize the importance of solicitation strategies in obtaining charitable gifts. However, Barascout’s (2012) research disputed this.
As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, researchers have disagreed about the number and type of stages in solicitation processes. My initial coding of “solicitation processes” included references meeting any of the definitions outlined in the previous chapter.

**Institutional Partners**

There are a number of people who may be involved with the solicitation processes of donors, especially at the major gift level. “Institutional partner” can refer to any staff member or volunteer acting on behalf of a nonprofit organization. Some examples include: Presidents, Deans, Board members, or students/other beneficiaries. Of the major gift donors interviewed by Panas (1984), the ones who gave gifts of a million dollars or more gave those gifts to institutions where there was a strong relationship between the donor and an institutional partner. These relationships with institutional partners are considered to be a significant determinant of major donors’ philanthropic behavior (King, 2005; Burlingame and Hodge, 1997).

Within the “solicitation process” references, I coded references to “institutional partners” when subjects referred to involvement of staff/faculty members or affiliated volunteers.

**Incidents and Milestones**

“Incidents and milestones” refer to events that take place during solicitation processes. Some examples include: visits to the campus, class reunions, or media attention. Donors also need to make decisions throughout their solicitation processes, and these choices impact their overall giving decisions. For example, donors may need to choose if they want to involve anyone in their giving decisions. For donors who are married, the key person involved is almost always the donors’ spouse. Panas (1984) found that husbands and wives give major gifts in partnership. He found that donors will also consult with an attorney or accountant if they’re considering making a gift of “major proportions” (pg. 125).
Within the “solicitation process” references, I coded references to “incidents and milestones” when subjects discussed formal/informal events, and/or decisions subjects made that impacted their solicitation processes.

*Unanticipated Code*
**Design Issues**

I used interviews as the main source of data for my study. According to Berg (2007), “the value of interviewing is not only because it builds a holistic snapshot, analyzes words, and reports detailed views of informants, but also because it enables interviewees to speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings” (pg. 96). While interviews provided in-depth information about donors’ motivations, this method had some drawbacks. First, people’s memories are subject to considerable distortion and are apt to recall what might or should have happened, based on their attitudes or beliefs, rather than what actually did happen (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010, pg. 148). Hammersley and Gomm (2008) caution researchers that “what people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked, the conventions about what can be spoke about… by what [information] they think the interviewer wants, and by what they believe he/she would disapprove of” (pg. 100). This was a major consideration for my research. I was prepared for the fact that subjects may not be forthcoming about the role of self-interest in their giving decisions because it could be considered “taboo.” In order to mitigate the implications of this design choice, I decided to interview Development Officers at the institution who could either verify or contradict the data provided by the research subjects about their gifts. However, donor subjects came across as very open about their motivations- even when they involved ego and self-interest.

Unfortunately, self-selection bias was an inherent weakness of my research design. First, the case study institution excluded three out of the thirteen donors (23.1%) of the total research population. The case study institution removed these donors from consideration because they were expected to make additional large gifts to the University, and could be sensitive to a request to participate in this study. Additionally, the inclusion of research subjects was based upon which
subjects respond affirmatively to the request to participate. Fortunately, seven of the ten (70%) from the contacted sample agreed to participate.

Some qualitative researchers (Creswell, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1988) have questioned the relevance of internal and external validity measures for qualitative research, specifically case studies. These researchers, in addition to others (Creswell, 2003; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010; Yin, 2003) suggest that qualitative researchers validate their findings through triangulation of data. According to Yin (2003), triangulation should be used because any finding is “more likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information” (pg. 98). For this reason, I collected data from two sources. The main source of data was from in-depth interviews with the identified major gift donor population. I also obtained the data through in-depth interviews conducted with designated fundraising staff members from the case study institution. These staff members provided background information on each donor subject.

There are several strategies I used to determine if my approaches were consistent, or reliable. Yin (2003) suggests that qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and document as many of the steps of the procedure as possible. I thoroughly documented all steps of my study, in order to allow other researchers to replicate my study in the future. Gibbs (2007) suggests that reliability in qualitative research is largely based on the researcher’s coding scheme and procedures. Therefore, he recommends making sure that there is not a shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process by constantly comparing data with the codes and by writing memos about the codes and their definitions. Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that consistency of the coding be in agreement at least 80% of the time for good qualitative reliability. I have outlined all codes, along with specific conceptual
definitions for each of them, in the previous section of this chapter. I exercised caution throughout the data analysis process to ensure the reliability of my study.

Lastly, I must address the issue of generalizability. I conducted a case study at only one institution. Other philanthropy researchers have generalized their findings at one institution to the general population (Holmes, 2009; Gaier, 2005; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995). A number of other researchers have found consistency in the motivations of donors, regardless of the institutions to which they give (Burk, 2003; Ostrower, 1995; Prince and File, 1994). My intent was that my findings would help to build a theory of the motivations and influences of major gift donors naming physical structures with their philanthropic gifts to their alma maters. My findings, discussed in the following chapter, can be theoretically generalized. In theoretical generalization (also known as “analytical generalization”), researchers develop explanations of the relationships between variables observed in their studies (Sharp, 1998). Such theoretical explanations are supposed to be applicable to the populations on which the studies were based, and can be applied to explain the phenomenon concerned (Tsang, 2013). Tsang (2013) argues that case studies have merits over quantitative methods in terms of theoretical generalization.

**Considerations of Human Subjects**

Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy and Ormond, 2010, pg. 101). “Protection from harm” was not a concern for my research since participants were not exposed to physical or psychological harm. However, participants were informed at the beginning of their interviews that they did not have to answer any questions if they were uncomfortable doing so. All subjects answered every question that they were asked so, presumably, no subjects felt uncomfortable during their participation.
The main ethical issue posed by my research was the privacy of research subjects and confidentiality of their responses. I asked donors for personal information about their economic, psychological, and sociological motivations, so privacy protection measures were paramount. First, like Barascout (2012) and King (2005), the case study institution and participants are not identified by name, nor are personally-identifiable characteristics contained anywhere in this final report. These measures were established to help protect the anonymity of participants.

I offered research subjects the discretion to choose whether or not to have their responses shared with the case study institution. I wanted donors to be open and honest with me about their motivations and experiences, which they may not have been if they believed their responses would be shared. One donor initially asked me to ensure their anonymity because they thought that what they said might be reported to the case study institution and exploited in order to raise more money. Once I explained the Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved protections, the donor happily agreed to participate.

“Informed consent” was another ethical issue for my study. Participation in my study was completely voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point. No participants chose to withdraw from the study. Each participant was required to read and sign an informed consent form (Appendix D and Appendix E), which also included a separate signature line to consent to being audio-recorded.

The final ethical consideration, “honesty with professional colleagues,” was achieved through several measures. First, I have maintained records of all interview audio-recordings, transcripts, signed consent forms, e-mail communications, and all other documents pertinent to the study. Second, I’ve included the following section, “Researcher’s Role,” to clearly outline any actual or perceived biases.
**Researcher’s Role**

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Policy and Leadership program at the State University of New York at Albany. I have spent over ten years in the field of fundraising, and over four years in higher education fundraising. I informed research subjects of my background, and offered to answer any questions they had relating to my professional background and/or my relationship with the case study institution.

My current job is to work with higher education institutions and other nonprofit organizations to provide consultation services on their fundraising programs. I, in partnership with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), determined that there was no conflict of interest since I have not provided services to the case study institution.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the results of my study, as they pertain to the research questions. My study was designed to address the research questions and sub-questions stated in the next section. This chapter is organized into two main sections: a) Research Question 1 Results, and b) Research Question 2 Results.

Research Questions

My entire study was based on the research questions and sub-questions listed below. This chapter is organized based on the order of these questions and underlined constructs.

1) What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

   a. Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

2) What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?

   a. Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

   b. What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

   c. What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?
Data Analysis

Treatment of Data

All data was collected through one-on-one interviews with research subjects. The data collection procedures are thoroughly detailed in the previous chapter. Upon completion of each interview, I sent the audio-recorded interview file to an independent third-party company for professional transcription. Once I received the completed interview transcript, I read the transcript while listening to the corresponding interview audio-recording to ensure accuracy. Minor corrections were made to the transcripts, but there were no major discrepancies. During this process, I reviewed my field notes and reflective memos, and identified some of the predominant categories, factors, and themes of each interview.

I then e-mailed each interview transcript to the corresponding participant and asked them to review their transcript and notify me if they had any recommended revisions. Only one participant responded to this request and asked to add a total of three sentences to his response to one question. The additions did not provide any additional relevant information to my study. All other interview transcripts remained unchanged.

Coding of Data

I uploaded all final interview transcripts to NVivo in preparation for coding. For the first level of coding, I read each donor interview transcript, and coded them based on whether they addressed my first research question and/or second research question. This initial step was intended to break down the large amount of data into organized, manageable parts. The data addressing the first research question was coded as “Motivations” and data addressing the second research question was coded as “Solicitation Process.”
I first addressed the “Motivations” data aimed at answering my first research question. To answer this question, I needed to address its sub-question by identifying the economic, psychological, and sociological motivations of donor subjects. During the proposal stage, I developed a list of anticipated codes based on the relevant literature. The definitions for these codes are included in the Coding Process section of the previous chapter. I used these codes to create an initial list of “nodes” in NVivo. As I went through the initial coding process, it became evident that additional codes/nodes were needed. These codes were defined and added to the node list.

I coded the interview transcripts sentence-by-sentence, and applied the appropriate code or codes to each sentence. If back-to-back sentences were part of the same thought and code, I coded them as one reference.

Upon completing the first round of coding, I re-read the references within each code to ensure appropriate alignment with the code definitions. While reading these references, it was clear that additional levels of coding were needed within several codes, which was thoroughly detailed in the previous chapter. I repeated this process of coding until I could identify distinct, fundamental themes within each code.

To address my second research question, my first step was to code the interview transcripts from Development Officer subjects. Similar to the first step with the donor interview transcripts, I identified the references associated with the “Solicitation Process” code.

My second research question contains three sub-questions that needed to be answered. Therefore, the next level of coding was based on the variables in the first two sub-questions: “Institutional Partners,” and “Incidents and Milestones.” These definitions are described in the Coding Process section of the previous chapter.
Upon completion of this coding, I re-read the references within each code to ensure appropriate alignment with the code definitions. While reading these references, it was clear that additional levels of coding were needed within each of these two codes. This is detailed in the previous chapter. I repeated this process of coding until I identified distinct themes within each code.

To answer the third sub-question of the second research question, I compared the coding from donors’ interview transcripts to the coding from their corresponding Development Officers’ interview transcripts. For each Development Officer-Donor pairing, I made a list of every similarity and every difference between their transcripts. After completing this process for all seven pairings, I read through each list of similarities and differences. While doing this, I was able to identify overarching categories. I created new lists for each category and separated the similarities/differences from the previous step into the appropriate category. I read through the items within each category and identified emerging themes from that data.

**Research Question 1 Results**

The first research question is addressed through its sub-question about the economic, psychological, and sociological motivations of alumni major gift donors who name physical structures at their alma mater with their philanthropic gifts. Figure 4 below provides an overview of the results addressing these questions. The following sections explore the results in detail.
Figure 4: Research Question 1 Results
**Economic Motivations**

This section explores the financial and economic factors that participants considered when making their giving decisions. Economic motivations were the least commonly referenced motivations for giving, compared with psychological and sociological motivations. There were three themes that emerged through the coding of economic motivations: a) financial considerations, b) opportunity cost, and c) tax implications.

Figure 5 below provides a visual depiction of the economic motivations cited by donor participants. The following three sections further detail the codes and themes represented below.

**Figure 5: Economic Motivation Results**
Financial Considerations

All seven donor participants made at least one reference to considering financial factors when making their giving decisions. This was the third most commonly referenced motivation overall.

All respondents indicated that their philanthropy to the case study institution began with smaller, annual gifts. When asked about how he started giving to the school, one subject answered, “I’d always given them a small amount of money after I graduated, like 25 bucks here or 30 bucks there. I was a PhD student, so I didn’t have a lot of money to give.” Other respondents expressed similar views by stating that they did not have the means to make large gifts to the case study institution until many years after they graduated. For five of these participants, they didn’t consider giving more than these minimal gifts until they were contacted by a Development Officer. The other two participants indicated that their gifts to the school increased as their available income increased.

Four out of seven of these respondents explicitly stated that they were either "financially well-off," or doing "financially well."

Two out of the seven respondents stated that their employers matched their charitable gifts to the case study institution, and that it was a major factor influencing their giving decisions. Some companies offer their employees a benefit referred to as a "matching gift." When an employee from one of these companies makes a gift to a charitable organization, their employer will give a proportionate amount to the same nonprofit on the employee's behalf. For example, an alumnus may make a gift of $1,000 to their alma mater. If their employer matches philanthropic gifts 1:1, the company will then make an additional gift of $1,000 to the school on behalf of the employee. The employer may also place restrictions on the organizations to which they will provide matching
gifts, the minimum and maximum amounts that they will match, the ratio that they will match, and the timing of the gifts. Most charitable organizations will give the individual donors credit for matching gifts received on their behalf. Therefore, the employee in the example above would receive recognition for a $2,000 gift, even though he only gave $1,000 of his own money to the school. The two participants who referenced matching gifts expressed that this was a motivator for their giving because it exponentially increased the impact of their gift, without it having a commensurate impact on their finances.

Four out of seven of the respondents stated that they determined the amount that they were going to give based on their financial status over the needs of the school. In other words, these individuals decided that they were going to give a gift of a specific amount, and then worked with the school to determine the purpose of their gift. Two out of these four respondents collectively made four references to "affordability" as the main factor for deciding on a gift amount. All four of these respondents stated that they considered various financial factors when evaluating how much they could give. One subject said, “It’s about where you’re staged in your life, your age, your financial resources, and what else you are involved in.”

All asks were done one-on-one between the donors and their assigned Development Officers. Four of the seven respondents described the actual asks as "transactional." These were the same four respondents who decided on the amount they would give before considering the institution's gift levels. The Development Officers provided them with a "menu" of gift options. All stated that they picked an option based on it falling within the range that they intended to give. One donor described this process by stating, "I said, 'here's my price range.' [The Development Officer] said, 'Okay, for that range you can do these [gift options].' And it was pretty much a five-minute discussion."
The other three respondents implied that they considered the giving options, and then decided on their gift amounts. They all talked with their assigned Development Officers about the type of impact that they wanted to have with their gifts before deciding on the amount that they would give. The Development Officers then offered those prospects opportunities that reflected the donors' interests.

Of these three respondents, two expressed that an important influencer of their economic motivations for giving was information that they received from their respective Development Officers. They felt that those Development Officers educated them about the case study institution’s funding. When asked how he decided on the amount he would give, one participant said, “I actually thought that [Case Study Institution] was funded by the state… since it is a public university… One of the things that I learned from [Development Officer] is the fact that the school isn’t entirely funded by the state. When I learned that [Case Study Institution] only received a portion of their total budget from the state, I decided to give more so that they can make things happen.”

**Opportunity Cost**

All seven participants recognized that there was an opportunity cost of their giving, though they did not all explicitly state so. Some simply mentioned other expenses in their lives, while others explicitly said that they had to consider the impact their gifts would have on other financial aspects of their lives. There were two main opportunity costs referenced: a) giving to other charitable organizations, and b) individual and family expenses. These were not mutually exclusive.

All seven participants stated that they give to other charitable organizations, and explicitly named at least three other organizations each. However, six indicated that the case study institution
was their giving priority. Five out of the seven respondents said that their major named gifts to the case study institution were the largest charitable gifts that they had ever given. Of the two participants who had given larger gifts to other organizations, one said, “you could give your money to a whole gambit of other nonprofits that are actually saving lives versus educating people.” Another participant said that he designated a certain amount he planned to donate, “and whichever nonprofit asked first usually won.”

Five respondents talked about their personal and familial expenses being a main financial consideration because of the opportunity costs of their giving. When asked about the amount and timing of his major named gift, one donor replied, “I’ve got two teenagers, both freshman, one in college and one in high school. I had to save and pay for their education, so I could only give so much at that time.” Another participant talked about her financial obligations to “siblings and relatives,” saying, “I feel that’s a form of charity too. We help them out. You can help out certain areas that sometimes some of these people that you are closest to at many times need a lot of help. That needs to come before external charity.” Beyond familial considerations, two donors cited their own expenses. One explicitly mentioned his mortgage being his priority before giving. However, the other donor had a different thought process about the opportunity cost of his giving. He said, “after the sixth or seventh car, how many more could I need?”

**Tax Implications**

Four participants made some reference to the consideration of tax implications when making their giving decisions. This was the least commonly referenced motivation overall. It’s important to note that this includes both donors who did and did not consider tax implications. Only two out of the seven respondents explicitly said that they considered the tax implications of their gifts when making their giving decisions. However, they said that they did not revise the
amount or purpose of their gifts because of the tax implications. One participant said that he slightly revised the timing of his gift based on how the tax implications would affect him. The other said that he wanted to know how the tax implications would affect him before making his gift, but he didn’t revise his decisions based on that knowledge.

Two other donor participants explicitly stated that they did not consider tax implications when making their giving decisions. One of these donors stated that the then-current tax structure would not have a substantial impact on him, so he did not bother to consider the implications. The other donor, conversely, said that he did not consider the tax implications of his gift because, "This is something I did from the heart... It was something I wanted to do." These are two different perspectives. One represents a logical choice, whereas the other represents an emotional one. In other words, the quote from the first donor was only coded as an economic motivation. The second donor’s quote was coded as both an economic and psychological motivation.

**Psychological Motivations**

All seven participants referenced at least one psychological motivation for giving in their interviews. Psychological motivations were the most commonly referenced motivations.

The two most commonly referenced motivations in the study were “appreciation” and “affinity” for the case study institution. Appreciation was referenced a total of 48 times by all seven research participants. Affinity was referenced a total of 31 times by all seven research participants. Due to the amount of references, both of these codes were broken down into several sub-codes.

The least commonly referenced psychological motivations were “obligation” and “warm glow.” Obligation was referenced eight times by three out of the seven research participants. Warm glow was referenced nine times by four out of the seven research participants.
Figure 6 below provides a visual depiction of the psychological motivations cited by donor participants. The following five sections further detail the codes and themes represented below.

**Figure 6: Psychological Motivation Results**
Appreciation

Appreciation was the most commonly referenced motivation overall, with all seven research participants citing it. There were three distinct categories of appreciation, based on what the participants expressed an appreciation for: a) their professional readiness and success, b) affordability of the case study institution, and c) specific faculty or staff members at the case study institution.

One of the major themes in this code was “social mobility.” This theme is a combination of the three sub-codes listed above. One participant said, “I feel like I was able, through [Case Study Institution], to go from lower-middle class, to middle class, to upper class. I got to be a top one-percenter from what I learned at [Case Study Institution], so why wouldn’t I be appreciative?” Another participant said, “I have to pinch myself. My parents are school teachers, so I pinch myself at my success, and it all started with [Case Study Institution].”

The most commonly referenced form of appreciation was an appreciation for the professional readiness, and ultimate success achieved by participants because of the case study institution. Six of the seven research participants referenced this type of appreciation.

Some of the quotes from subjects were focused on the outcomes of their lives. For example, one subject said, “I kind of got very nostalgic about the school, so I said, ‘you know what? Life’s been good for me, I’ve had a good career, I’ve been financially and intellectually successful with what I’ve done. I’ve got a great family. I love what I do. I love my work.’ I look back on my time at [Case Study Institution] and I said, ‘you know what? That school’s been good to me. They took me in, gave me an education, got me my degree, and got me into [graduate school].’ I just feel that the school is to thank.” More simply put, another subject stated, “The school is near and dear to my heart since I went there and obviously it worked out well for me, so why not give back?”
Other quotes from subjects were focused on the foundational education and experiences that they received from the case study institution. For example, one subject said, “The reason why I give money to [Case Study Institution] is that I feel that it has provided me with the foundation of my professional success. Without [Case Study Institution], I don’t feel I would be where I am today.” Another subject described his philanthropy by saying, “it’s investing and re-investing in education in the place that got me started.” When asked about his motivations for giving, another subject replied, “just to give my thanks to the school for giving me the education to get me where I was.”

Four of the seven participants made a reference to an appreciation for the affordability of the case study institution and/or for financial assistance that they received. For example, one donor said, “I had a [Scholarship] to go to [Case Study Institution]. That’s how I was able to fund going to school. I sort of felt like I needed to give back.” The other subjects expressed a similar sentiment.

The four subjects who referenced the affordability of the case study institution referred to the affordability of the school from when they were students- not present day. Two of these subjects mentioned that the school is not as affordable today as it was when they were students. However, they did not express opinions, negative or positive, about the affordability for current students. In their references, these donors were simply expressing an appreciation for the fact that the case study institution was affordable for them, and then made the observation about the difference today. For example, one subject stated, “[Case Study Institution] got me started and I directly feel like the education I got there helped me. I learned that I got good value at [Case Study Institution] ... so both the education was great, and I was able to pay for it myself. Back in the day I could attend with some working and a small student loan. Unlike it is today.”
Four of the seven research subjects expressed an appreciation for a faculty or staff member, and expressed this as a factor motivating their philanthropic gifts to the case study institution. Three of these four participants directed their appreciation toward a School Dean (they all named the same person). One participant said, “[The Dean] was the one that really kind of guided me through my undergraduate years and talked to me while I was just starting my career. So, he’s had a profound effect on my life, and I’m forever indebted to him. So, whenever I write those checks, I think of him.” The other subject expressed an appreciation for another faculty member. This participant was unsure of the faculty member’s title, but thought that he was a Department Head and Professor.

All four participants’ appreciation for faculty or staff members seemed to overlap with their appreciation for their professional readiness and success. These participants felt that the faculty or staff members were responsible for providing them with guidance and education, which led to their professional readiness and success.

**Affinity**

All seven research participants indicated that their affinity for the case study institution was something that motivated their giving to the school. This was the second most commonly referenced psychological motivation, and the second most commonly referenced motivation in the study.

There were two common themes within this code. The first is a general affinity for the case study institution. The second theme is the student experience, which refers to an affinity for the case study institution stemming from donors’ experiences at the school from when they were students. These two themes are not mutually exclusive.
All seven respondents made at least one reference to having a general affinity for the case study institution. The levels of affinity varied significantly, though. Some of the words that donors used to describe their feelings toward the case study institution were “proud,” “nostalgic,” “excited,” and “love.”

One participant said, “I look back so fondly on my experiences at [Case Study Institution] ... It is just such an integral part of my life.” Another donor said, “Since graduating, I’ve always thought fondly of this school and remembered my times there.” When discussing his major named gift, one donor said, “I’m pretty excited about it... I think so positively about the university.”

Two donors mentioned that the case study institution’s sports teams made them feel more connected to the school. The both said that they felt their bond increased during times when the school’s sports teams were doing well. One of these donors said, “I’m a [Case Study Institution’s Mascot] at heart. I can’t help myself!”

Within the “student experience” theme, referenced by four participants, there were an additional two themes. Two of the four respondents referenced an affinity for the case study institution growing from a positive academic student experience. Both respondents discussed academic experiences outside of the classroom. One was an internship and the other was academic advising and tutoring. These donors stated that these experiences built their connection to the school. They also expressed a significant gratitude for those experiences, which overlapped with the appreciation code.

The second theme within the “student experience,” code, similar to the first, referenced an affinity for the case study institution growing from a positive non-academic student experience. This included social relationships, extracurricular activities, etc. Three donors referenced this type of motivation, one of which had also referenced a positive academic experience.
Two of the three respondents in this category explicitly referenced the drinking age being 18, rather than 21, while they were students at the case study institution. This seemed to be a significant factor building their affinity with the school. They all talked about their social lives and the parties they attended, and how drinking was a significant part of that. One participant stated, “Back then the drinking age was 18. I have the fondest memories about the parties in my dorm and passing out on the football field. It was so much fun!” Another participant mirrored this sentiment by saying, “I’ll preface this by stating that the drinking age was 18 when I was a student. There was a bar in the campus center, and it was literally the greatest four years anyone could ever have!”

Another theme that was prevalent in this category was lasting social relationships. Two of the three respondents in this category discussed having an active social life as students at the case study institution, and also stated that they have maintained these friendships to present day. One donor met her husband in a class that they had together. Another donor stated, “I made friends that first hour of landing on campus when my parents dropped me off that are still some of my closest friends today, 40 years later.”

One aspect of the non-academic student experience was extracurricular activities. In this study, two respondents referenced their extracurricular activities as a main component of their affinity toward the case study institution. Both referenced intramural sports. One stated, “I was on the baseball team, even though I wasn’t very good. They let me stay on the team just because of my attitude, and I hustled, and I was fun to hang out with. I just loved my baseball experience!” The other said, “I fondly remember the intramural sports we used to play.” He also talked about his involvement with the campus chapel. This donor did disclose that he also made a gift to support the chapel because of his affinity for it, stemming from his student experience there.
Recognition

Given that all of the gifts being studied provided the donor participants with public recognition, “recognition” was an important factor. Five of the seven participants stated that recognition was a consideration in their giving decisions, while the other two participants explicitly stated that it was not a major consideration.

One of the donors stated, “It’s hard to explain the gratification I got from having my name on a classroom.” Another donor said that he was motivated to give, in part, because he could show friends and family his name on a physical space.

Three donors talked about how they were treated as a major gift donor. He said, “Right now, when we show up, we are treated like royalty!” Another donor expanded on the role of recognition to him. He said, “[Case Study Institution] tried to kick me off campus when I was a student because I was a bit of a vandal when I was younger. My grades were not very good. I didn’t apply myself. But now I have University Presidents sucking up to me! The fact that I can turn around now and be king of the hill is such a lovely experience and I constantly laugh about it all the time. It’s good for my ego, but also good for [Case Study Institution] because I continue to give.”

Two of the seven research participants explicitly stated that public recognition did not influence their giving decisions. However, each of these donors only made one such reference.

Both participants said that they were planning to make a gift of a specific amount and to a specific purpose, regardless of the public recognition that they would receive. When talking about his major named gift, one donor stated, “the [naming] was really an afterthought.”

These two donors both mentioned opinions that they had about donors who do seek public recognition for their giving. One donor said, “People are different. I feel if you’re truly generous,
you shouldn’t expect a lot back... I understand that it is a personal thing, but if you receive happiness and joy, then that should be enough. I think you’d want to be shown appreciation, but it’s not something that has to be done. I get that you don’t want to be disrespected, but I don’t think there needs to be continuous recognition.” The other donor said, “I guess everybody is different. Some folks negotiate to put their name on something. For some people, that’s what they’re after, but for me it’s just more about [Case Study Institution] showing up and having a good story to raise money for something near and dear to my heart.”

**Warm Glow**

Four of the seven research participants referred to a “warm glow” effect as a motivation for their giving. This was also the fourth least commonly referenced motivation.

Some of the words that these four respondents used to describe the feelings that they experienced after giving to the case study institution were: “nostalgic,” “joy,” “gratified,” “proud,” “satisfied,” and “warm.” These emotions indicated a warm glow effect positively influencing these donors’ giving decisions. All of these respondents expressed similar emotions toward the case study institution itself- not just to their giving. Therefore, “affinity” for the case study was also noted as a motivation for these donors. In one case, the donor’s affinity toward the school appeared to grow as a result of his charitable gift. He stated, “[The named gift] just made me feel really positive and really warm toward [Case Study Institution].”

Additionally, these four participants didn’t express the same “warm glow” feelings when talking about their giving to other charitable organizations. They were asked about which other nonprofit organizations to which they made charitable gifts, which often sparked additional conversation about their reasons for giving to those organizations. However, it must be noted that
the participants were not asked to significantly expand on the information they offered about their charitable giving to organizations other than the case study institution.

All four of these respondents also expressed feelings of appreciation toward the case study institution. Therefore, the transcript sections coded as “warm glow” were often also coded as referencing an “appreciation” motivation for giving. For example, one participant said, “I kind of got very nostalgic seeing my [named physical structure] at [Case Study Institution]. I’ve had a great career. I have a great family and I love my work. I looked back at [Case Study Institution] and recognized that the school had been good to me... I gave because I had the school to thank for all of that and I just felt a sense of joy in doing that.”

**Obligation**

Obligation was the least commonly referenced psychological motivation, and one of the least commonly referenced motivations for giving overall. Three of the seven research participants referenced “obligation” as a motivation for their giving. One theme that emerged was one of guilt. Two respondents indicated that they felt like they had to give to the case study institution. One respondent stated, “I was honor-bound to [make the gift].” Another respondent stated that he felt guilty for giving to his graduate school, but not to his undergraduate school (the case study institution) and, for this reason, he felt obligated to make the gift being studied. He said that the gift he made to the case study institution “made it easier to sleep at night.”

Two of the three respondents stated that they felt obligated to make philanthropic gifts to the case study institution because of honors they received. One received an achievement award from the school, and then felt he had to give more. The other was asked to join a School Advisory Board, where members were obligated to make philanthropic gifts. Two other respondents
mentioned receiving similar honors, but did not indicate that they felt obligated to make contributions afterward.

One respondent stated that he felt obligated to give because of the person who solicited his gift. He said that he didn’t feel obligated to the school, but felt that he had to say “yes” to the solicitor. No other respondents mentioned this form of obligation.

While analyzing the data coded under “Obligation,” I noticed a trend of indifferent wording in participants’ responses. For example, one participant said, “obviously [my education] worked out pretty well, so why not give a little back?” The two other respondents citing obligation as a motivation for their giving also used noncommittal wording, such as: “sort of,” “why not,” and “I guess.”

**Sociological Motivations**

All seven research participants referenced at least one sociological motivation for their giving. Sociological motivations were the second most referenced by donor subjects. “Making an Impact” was the most commonly referenced sociological motivation with all seven subjects making references to this motivation a total of 28 times. The second most commonly referenced sociological motivation was “Engagement,” and was referenced a total of 24 times by all seven subjects. Only three research subjects referenced “Legacy” as a motivation for their giving, making it the least commonly referenced sociological motivations. It was also one of the least commonly referenced motivations overall (tied with “Obligation”).

Figure 7 below provides a visual depiction of the sociological motivations cited by donor participants. The following four sections further detail the codes and themes represented in Figure 7.
Figure 7: Sociological Motivation Results
**Making an Impact**

All seven participants said that they wanted to make some sort of impact through their gifts to the case study institution. This was the most commonly referenced sociological motivation, and fourth most commonly referenced motivation overall. The type of impact that participants sought to have did vary. Within this code, three themes became evident, based on the type of impact participants wished to have: a) on individuals like the themselves, b) to push individual initiatives, and c) to support institutional priorities.

Four of the seven respondents cited “impacting individuals like themselves” as a factor motivating their philanthropy. However, only one donor cited this as a motivator for the major named gift being studied. The other three donors were referring to other, non-physical gifts that they previously made to the case study institution. The donor who named a tutoring/study room (physical space) stated that he did so, in part, because, “There used to be a big, cavernous gym that was used as a dance studio. We would actually go in there and study, and at the time I was tutoring a basketball player who was like six feet tall. The poor kid was trying to study, and I think we were going over sociology, and his knees were hitting the top of the little desk. It was so cold in there, and it was impossible to tutor or study like that... When there was a naming opportunity for a space that could be used for this purpose, it was a natural fit.”

Of the three donors wanting to have an impact through their non-physical gifts to the case study institution, all of them funded scholarships for students. One participant said, “My family had no money. I started working the day I was 16. I worked all through college and graduate school. I wanted another student who was trying to make it in life and was a hard worker to perhaps have the ability to get to college with some help with funding. Not that my money was going to put a lot of kids through college, but if it helped one student, that was one student more than zero.”
Another participant established a scholarship for business students who were also involved in athletics because he was a business major who also played on the baseball team as a student. He said that he funded this scholarship so he “could recreate someone to follow my path.”

Three of the seven participants expressed a desire to push their own initiatives through their philanthropy to the case study institution. Each donor stated that they had an interest in a particular problem, and they wanted to use their philanthropy to address that problem. Two of the three donors felt that the case study institution was missing something that it needed to fulfill its mission, and they made their gifts in order to fund the addition of those priorities. The other donor wanted to bring his interest in another cause to the case study institution. Therefore, he made a gift to support scholarly work at the case study institution, in support of a different charitable mission.

The four research participants who did not push their own initiatives through their philanthropy expressed that they wanted to have an impact on the case study institution’s self-declared priorities. In other words, they allowed some of their giving decisions to be guided by the needs of the school. When talking about the giving decisions behind his major named gift, one donor stated, “The timing of the gift was driven by the school and by the fact that the [physical space] was old. I became very aware of what enhancements needed to be made to that building which could really impact the learning.” All four donors said that the needs of the school were communicated to them by their respective Development Officers. One participant said that he decided to give, “after learning a little more and having someone actually come in and talk to me about raising money for [Case Study Institution].”

**Engagement**

“Engagement” was the second most commonly referenced sociological motivation, and the fifth most commonly referenced motivation overall. All seven research participants referenced
some form of engagement with the case study institution, though the levels of engagement varied significantly. Two main types of engagement were referenced: a) engagement as an alumnus/a, and b) engagement as a student.

All seven participants referenced some type of engagement as alumni. However, the levels of engagement varied. Five subjects referenced school-sponsored alumni events as a form of engagement in which they partook. The participants viewed these events as a way to increase their social and professional networks. Two of these five participants stated that their engagement as alumni was limited to only attendance at “a couple” of local alumni social events or gatherings. Both of these subjects said that they had not been engaged with the case study institution for over ten years after they graduated, but re-engaged by attending these school-sponsored events.

Three participants said that their engagement with the case study institution was through their service in volunteer leadership roles. No participants served on the institution’s Board of Trustees, but two subjects served on School Advisory Boards, and one served on the Alumni Association Board. All three were enthusiastic and proud of their work in these roles.

Three participants engaged with the case study institution by volunteering in other non-leadership roles. All three served informally as volunteer mentors to current students from the case study institution. One participant described the experience by saying, “I stay involved by talking to some student panels, being a career counselor, and... whatever I can do to be useful or helpful. It’s one way of giving back.” Two of the three also talked about their experiences giving guest lectures at the case study institution. They were both very excited about engaging with the school and students in this way, and expressed a desire to do it more often. These two donors also referenced the “prestige benefit” factor of this experience.
No participants specifically referenced class reunions as a factor in their engagement or philanthropy.

Three of the seven research subjects cited their engagement as students as a factor motivating their philanthropy. One subject talked about her internship experience being her main engagement with the case study institution as a student. This portion of her interview was dually coded as “engagement” and “appreciation” because they were discussed together. She stated that this experience was enjoyable, but also is the reason she got her first job. For that reason, she made a major named gift, in part, because her engagement as a student led to appreciation for the professional readiness it provided. Another participant’s engagement as a student was centered around his social relationships with fellow classmates. The third subject’s engagement as a student was through his participation in multiple student activities. For the latter two subjects, their discussions of their engagement as students overlapped with their discussions of their affinity for the case study institution. For them, their engagement led them to develop a significant bond with the school, which, in turn, contributed to their philanthropic decisions.

Prestige, Signaling Wealth, or Social Status

Five out of the seven research participants referenced “prestige,” “signaling wealth,” and/or “social status” as a motivation contributing to their giving decisions.

Of the five participants, three stated that other alumni of the case study institution somehow influenced their decisions to make major named gifts. One said that he and his friends (who are also alumni of the case study institution) have friendly competitions to see who donates the most to the school. He said that the winners get “bragging rights,” and that it has motivated him to give more. He said, “Just seeing my friends give made me say, ‘I’m as good as you guys- I can do this too!’... It’s been this competitive little money battle between all of us, and everyone wins!”
Another donor talked about how she attended alumni gatherings near her home where she met other major gift donors. She commented, “All of those contributing really helped motivate me to do so.”

Three of the five participants explicitly stated that “ego” was a factor in their decisions to name physical structures. One donor talked about his motivations for his gift by saying, “My ego being stroked has a lot to do with it. It’s not something I’ll say publicly, but since you’re doing this study, you need to know how it is. I don’t care what anyone says, it’s good for the ego!” Another donor said, “This sounds egotistical, but it’s nice to have my name on something.”

Two of the five donors said that they were invited to the campus to be guest lecturers before making their gift. These donors said that it made them feel important and that they got joy from it, which inevitably influenced their decisions to make philanthropic contributions.

**Legacy**

“Legacy” was one of the least commonly referenced motivations for giving in this study. Only three participants expressed legacy as a motivation impacting their giving decisions, for a total of eight coded references from all donor interviews. However, the transcript sections coded under “legacy” were some of the most emotional and impactful quotes. The respondents used strong language, such as: “honor,” “pride,” “future,” and “family.” For example, one donor said, “After you take care of your family, what is the legacy that you’ll leave? I ask, ‘What mark can I leave to make the world a better place?’... It’s such a satisfying feeling knowing that you’re making a difference in people’s lives and helping to educate the future.” Another donor stated, “It’s hard to explain the gratification and satisfying feeling that I am giving back and not just wasting my legacy.”
All three respondents referenced “family” when talking about legacy. Two of them talked about their children. One talked about how he brought his children to the campus and they were able to see his named physical space. When talking about the space, he said, “I brought my family [to the school] and showed them the building. It’s there. It’s permanent. And it’s a connection to the University.” One donor referenced his grandfather, who was an alumnus of the case study institution, and his parents. He said that he made the gift to name a physical structure “to honor [his] family.”

**Research Question 2 Results**

The second research question is addressed through its three sub-questions. Since there were two different forms of data analysis used to answer this research question, the sub-questions are addressed differently in this section. The first two sub-questions, inquiring about the role of institutional partners and incidents/milestones in the solicitation processes, were analyzed through the same coding process as the first research question. Figure 8 below provides an overview of the results addressing these two sub-questions. The following two sections and respective sub-sections explore these results in detail.

The third sub-question was analyzed through a comparison between the coding in donors’ interview transcripts with their respective Development Officers’ coded interview transcripts.
Figure 8: Research Question 2, Sub-Questions 1 and 2 Results
Institutional Partners

All seven research participants stated that their respective Development Officers were either their main or only contact persons throughout the solicitation processes. All solicitations were made by the Development Officers.

Two donors spoke about meeting students of the case study institution during the solicitation processes. Both donors spoke very highly of these experiences. One donor said, “I actually got a chance to meet [students] I would impact. That’s probably the greatest thing you can feel- knowing you made a difference in someone else’s life.”

Five donors stated that a School Dean (all donors named the same person) was involved with their solicitation processes. These five donors were all solicited as part of the same fundraising campaign, in which the School Dean was heavily involved. The Dean was involved by initially contacting these donors on behalf of the Development Officers, and by meeting with them while they were on campus. One donor said, “He was such an important guy that people felt a sense of connection to the school because of him.” Two other donors said that this Dean was the main reason for their giving.

Three donors indicated that they engaged with at least one Athletic Coach during their solicitation processes. The Athletic Coaches were involved by meeting with donors while they were on campus, and by communicating with donors on a regular basis. These coaches also offered free tickets and merchandise to donors as a form of cultivation and/or stewardship. One donor said, “I have great relationships with all the athletic coaches... They were just such gentlemen, and such sharp guys... They did a good job of reaching out and keeping in touch.”
Figure 9 below provides a visual representation of the results from donors’ interviews relating to the involvement of institutional partners in the solicitation processes for their major named gifts.

*Figure 9: Institutional Partner Results*
Incidents and Milestones

Five out of the seven research participants made at least one formal visit each to the case study institution’s campus during the solicitation processes for their major named gifts. They were also given a tour of the campus, as well as the facilities where naming opportunities were available. One of these donors said that he “was treated like royalty” when he arrived on campus. Two donors said that they were asked to give guest lectures to students while they were on campus, which had a very positive impact on their giving decisions.

The other two research participants did not visit the campus at any point during their solicitation processes. They both said that they were offered tours, but declined due to scheduling and travel conflicts. These were also the same two donors who explicitly said that they did not care about public recognition for their gifts.

Five research participants were solicited to support a specific campaign. All five of these participants specifically referenced this campaign. They all referenced the specific campaign when discussing the solicitation processes for their major named gifts. They expressed an understanding of the School’s funding priorities, as well as support for those initiatives.

Spousal Involvement

One of the seven donor subjects had never been married, so spousal involvement was not a part of the solicitation process for him. The six other subjects were all married at the time they made their major named gift commitments.

All married subjects were asked about the involvement of their spouses in the solicitation processes for their major named gifts. All six married subjects indicated that their spouses were only involved in the most minimal ways. Ultimately, each of the research subjects identified themselves as the “deciders” relating to these gifts. For example, when asked if his wife was
involved during the solicitation process, one donor said, “Just to say ‘sure, fine.’ It wasn’t that important to her.” When asked the same question, another donor said, “Not so much, but she’s happy that we did it.”

Two of the six married donors indicated that their spouses had to be convinced to approve the expenditure before they made their gifts. One of these donors said, “I had to try to sneak it past my wife without her getting too upset at me about our future finances.” Another donor said, “I just had to clear it with [my wife], who doesn’t understand why I’m giving money to complete strangers when we have people in our family who could use that money. She says we should be giving to charity close to home. So, we have little discussions at home about it, but she understands my feelings about [Case Study Institution], so she agreed. And so, once my wife cleared [the gift], it was a no-brainer.”

**Professional Advisors**

All seven research subjects were asked if they consulted with any professional advisors before deciding about their major named gifts.

Only one participant said that he consulted with advisors regarding his major named gift. He said that he consulted with his lawyer by asking the lawyer to review the gift agreement drafted by the case study institution. This same donor also said that before making his gift commitment, he also spoke with his friend who is employed as a Development Officer at another higher education institution. The donor said that he did this just to get the opinion of a professional in the fundraising field. Ultimately, this donor did not revise his giving decisions based on his consultations with professional advisors.
Three of the seven research subjects stated that they did not consult with any advisors because they felt that they did not need advice. These three donors stated that they work in business and/or financial fields, and therefore did not require additional guidance regarding their giving.

Three research subjects stated that they didn’t consult with any professional advisors because they had made up their minds to make their respective major named gifts, and wouldn’t change their minds based on the guidance of an “outsider.” One participant stated, “This is something that I did from my heart. No one advised me to do this. No one gave me legal advice or accounting advice. It was just something I wanted to do.”

Figure 10 below provides a visual representation of the results from donors’ interviews relating to the role of incidents and milestones in the solicitation processes for their major named gifts. The following two sub-sections further detail the remaining themes within this code.
Figure 10: Incident and Milestone Results
Solicitation Process Recollections

The third sub-question of the second research question sought to identify the similarities and differences between donors’ perceptions of their solicitation processes compared to their respective Development Officers’ perceptions of the same solicitation processes. There were seven donors/gifts and six Development Officers interviewed. One Development Officer was assigned to two of the donors/gifts and, therefore, participated in two separate interviews.

Interestingly, all seven Development Officer-Donor pairings agreed on the series of events in their respective solicitation processes. When the donor subjects detailed their solicitation processes during their interviews, they almost exactly matched the descriptions given by their respective Development Officers. All gift solicitations being studied occurred between three and ten years before the interviews were conducted. However, twelve of the thirteen interviewees seemed to easily recall the solicitation processes. The other interviewee, a Development Officer, had to review his notes several times during the interview because he did not recall the information to answer my questions. The gift he was discussing took place nine years before the interview. Ultimately, his recollection of events still matched that of his corresponding donor.

The emerging themes within this sub-question fell into four categories representing four solicitation process stages: a) Qualification, b) Cultivation, c) Solicitation, and d) Stewardship. Figure 11 below provides a visual representation of the results from this sub-question. The following four sections explore these results in greater detail.
Figure 11: Research Question 2, Sub-Question 3 Results


**Qualification**

The qualification category included any themes related to: a) actions leading up to, and including, the first meeting between Development Officer and Donor, and b) efforts by the Development Officer to determine Donor’s inclination or capacity for giving to Case Study Institution.

In all except one of the Development Officer-Donor pairings, the interviewed Development Officer was the first fundraising employee from the case study institution to contact the respective donor. The Development Officers then worked with their corresponding donors from that first contact through their participation in this study. In the other Development Officer-Donor pairing, the donor previously worked with one other fundraising employee from the case study institution before being assigned to the current Development Officer. This pairing had worked together for the five years leading up to their interviews. The major named gift being studied was made during the time that this Development Officer worked with this donor.

All Development Officers demonstrated significant knowledge of their respective donors’ biographical information. Most of their knowledge was about the donors’ families. Without being prompted, the Development Officers offered personal information about their donors, such as: names and ages of children, occupations of family members, and life events.

However, only two Development Officers demonstrated knowledge of their donors’ philanthropic priorities outside of the case study institution. All seven donors stated that they make regular contributions to at least three other charitable organizations. Most Development Officers were unable to identify these organizations/causes. Surprisingly, most Development Officers were also unaware of how their respective donors ranked the case study institution in comparison to these other organizations. For example, one Development Officer stated, “I wouldn’t say that we
are the highest on his priority list, but we have certainly moved higher than his graduate school.” However, the corresponding donor stated that the case study institution was his highest charitable priority, and that he was donating more to them than any other organization.

**Cultivation**

The cultivation category included any themes related to: a) actions leading up to gift solicitation, and b) relationship-building between Donor and Development Officer/Case Study Institution.

The first theme involves the relationship-building that took place between Development Officers and donors. On average, the Development Officers worked with their respective donors for two years before the donors committed to the major named gifts being studied. All donors made smaller gifts up until those larger commitments.

The most common theme for this sub-question was that in all seven Development Officer-Donor pairings both parties explicitly stated that they had a strong relationship with the other. Development Officers spoke very highly of the donor subjects they worked with, and the donor subjects felt that they had a strong bond with their respective Development Officers. None of the Development Officers or donors were specifically asked about their relationships with the other, but all voluntarily offered the information. In some cases, both members of the pairings used similar wording to describe this relationship. For example, one donor said, “[Development Officer] is my pipeline into the school. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty to make sure that I feel appreciated.” The corresponding Development Officer said, “I do feel like I go above and beyond, but it’s not insincere at all. I think it’s very sincere. He’s a very good guy and it’s a pleasure to work with him. He is really a great guy.” This theme seemed to hold great importance to all Development Officers and donor subjects in the study.
The second theme involves the relationship-building between the donor and the case study institution. As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, most donors’ connections with the institution came about, in part, from their experiences as students. “Affinity,” “Appreciation,” and “Engagement” were three of the most commonly referenced motivations by donor subjects. These three motivations also contained themes arising from donors’ experiences as students at the case study institution. However, none of the Development Officers in this study demonstrated any substantial knowledge of their donors’ student experiences. In fact, Development Officers were specifically asked about this topic, but could only provide vague information.

All Development Officers focused heavily on the engagement of their respective donors as alumni. They all knew about the activities in which their donors participated, and felt that these activities had a significant impact on donors’ giving decisions. While donors corroborated their alumni involvement, they did not emphasize it as a motivator for their giving in the way that the Development Officers did. For example, one Development Officer stated, “I believe the real catalyst to [Donor’s] gift was that he is very involved as an alum… That’s really what prompted him to give back.” The corresponding donor did reference this involvement as a motivator for his giving, but not one of the main factors. Rather, he referenced other factors which motivated him to give back his time (by becoming involved in the activities referenced by the Development Officer) and his money. This was a consistent theme in all of the Development Officer-Donor pairings.

Conversely, there were two forms of alumni engagement that donors cited as motivators for their giving, but were not recognized by their respective Development Officers: a) school-sponsored alumni events, and b) guest lecturing. These two activities were explored thoroughly in the previous section, “Research Question 1 Results.” Some Development Officers stated that their
respective donors participated in one or more of these activities, but did not expand beyond the mention of them.

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, most donors referenced relationships with faculty and/or staff members of the case study institution. However, only one Development Officer demonstrated an awareness of the corresponding donor’s feelings toward specific institutional partners. One of the common themes in the previous section, “Research Question 1 Results,” was the strong positive influence of institutional partners on donors’ giving decisions. Therefore, it was surprising that the Development Officers were unaware of these relationships and their impact on donors. The Development Officers also stated that they did not formally involve other faculty/staff in their fundraising strategies for their respective donors.

**Solicitation**

The solicitation category included any themes related to: a) “the ask,” and b) factors related to Donor’s decision in response to “the ask.” All Development Officers and donors agreed that their major named gift asks were done one-on-one between them. They also agreed that “the ask” was quick, and it took the donors no more than approximately three months to formally sign a commitment for these gifts. They agreed that the donors made no significant objections to the solicitations, nor did they negotiate the terms of the commitments. When asked if he had any objections to giving, one donor stated, “Well, [Case Study Institution] has been slipping in terms of rankings over the years, which I wasn’t too happy about… There’s also been turnover in terms of the President of the school. We don’t seem to be able to keep someone with any type of longevity. But that’s just life. My allegiance is to [Case Study Institution] itself. So, do I think twice about it? Yeah, I have. But it didn’t stop me from writing checks.”
The most obvious and surprising theme was that Development Officers seemed to have very little understanding of their corresponding donors’ motivations for saying “yes” to the respective major named gift solicitations. Development Officers were all asked what they felt their donors’ motivations for giving were. Some were able to name a couple of correct motivations, but none demonstrated a thorough understanding of what factors influenced their respective donors’ giving decisions. For example, one Development Officer was asked if his donor had relationships with any other faculty or staff from the case study institution. He said, “I don’t think that [Donor] was really all that familiar with the people here on campus.” However, when the corresponding donor was asked if he had relationships with institutional partners, he said, “Yes. [School Dean] is probably the main reason that I gave.”

Stewardship

The stewardship category included any themes related to: a) actions after the gift commitment was made, and b) efforts to make Donor feel recognized/appreciated for their gift. None of the Development Officers claimed primary responsibility for the stewardship of their donors. They mentioned that the case study institution has formal stewardship procedures which are carried out by designated staff members. However, five of the six Development Officers said that they did informally steward their six donors for their gifts. Some examples included: personalized correspondence to donors, photographs of named spaces, and school merchandise or event tickets. All six of these donors specifically referenced this informal, personalized stewardship when asked if they felt appreciated by the case study institution. None of the seven donors mentioned formal stewardship.
Conclusion

The data obtained through interviews with donors and Development Officers of the case study institution provided a significant amount of data. As previously discussed, there was previously no research that specifically studied the population of alumni major gift donors who have named physical structures at their alma maters. For this reason, I took a grounded theory approach to my study. Therefore, I did not initially impose a theoretical framework. Rather, I used the data to help toward building a theory, making data analysis extremely important.

While this chapter focused on the raw data analysis, the next chapter will further discuss the results in relationship to the study, the literature, and the field of fundraising.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this final chapter, I address my research questions and sub-questions. The findings detailed in the previous chapter provided the basis for the answers to my research questions and sub-questions. I also recognize the unanticipated factors that constrained my interpretations of these findings. While no research has previously been conducted on the population of alumni donors who name physical structures with their major gifts to their alma maters, I was able to compare my findings to those of other researchers who have studied related donor populations.

It was my intention that my study would contribute new knowledge for practitioners and researchers. In the final sections of this chapter, I explain the implications of my study for researchers, higher education institutions, and for fundraising practitioners. I also provide recommendations for future research.

It is important to note that the term “donor” is used in this chapter to describe the population that my research studied: alumni donors who named physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters. This is the case throughout this chapter only, but does not apply to any citations or references to the research of others.

Similarly, the term “gift” is used in this chapter to describe the major gifts, as defined in the Introduction chapter, that were made in exchange for the naming of physical structures. This is the case throughout this chapter only, but does not apply to any citations or references to the research of others.
Research Questions

- What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?

- Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

- What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

- What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?

Addressing the Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

My study revealed that donors make at least six decisions about their charitable gifts: a) whether or not to give, b) to which organization to give, c) how much to give, d) when to give, e) how to give, and f) to which purpose to give. The donors in my study had to address each of these before they eventually arrived at their decisions to make major named gifts to name physical structures at their alma mater.

Ultimately, I was able to conclude that the alumni who make major gifts to name physical structures at their alma maters are motivated by a variety of factors. These donors’ motivations were comprised of a combination of economic, psychological, and sociological factors. Every
donor in this study referenced at least two economic, two psychological, and two sociological motivations for their major named gifts.

The economic, psychological, and sociological motivations each appeared to have specific main roles in the donors’ giving decision-making processes. The giving decisions of “whether or not to give,” “how much to give,” “when to give,” and “how to give” seemed to be primarily motivated by economic factors. The giving decision of “to which organization to give” was primarily motivated by psychological factors. Lastly, sociological factors mainly motivated the giving decision of “to which purpose to give.”

There were twelve total donor motivations identified. Figure 12 below depicts these twelve motivations, the number of donors referencing each motivation, and the total references per motivation.

**Figure 12: Donor Motivations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order (most to least referenced)</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Motivation Type</th>
<th>Number of Donors</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Financial Considerations</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Making an Impact</td>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prestige/Signaling Wealth/ Social Status</td>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Opportunity Cost</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Warm Glow</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tax Implications</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>246</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“Legacy” and “Obligation” were tied as the second least commonly referenced motivations
The motivators referenced by donors were relatively consistent and homogenous. First, there was consistency in the number of referenced motivations. Each donor in this study considered a minimum of nine factors and a maximum of eleven factors which motivated their giving decisions.

Second, there was consistency in the type of motivations referenced by donors. As shown in Figure 12 above, all seven donors referenced the following seven motivations: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, and g) Opportunity Cost. This data provides preliminary evidence that alumni donors who name physical structures with their gifts will consider these seven factors when making their giving decisions.

In addition to the seven motivations referenced above, all seven subjects cited a combination of the following five factors as considerations in their giving decision-making processes: a) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, b) Warm Glow, c) Obligation, d) Legacy, and e) Tax Implications. None of these seemed to be the main motivator in donors’ giving decisions. Rather, they were supplementary to the seven other motivations. However, since all subjects referenced at least two of these motivations, it’s reasonable to conclude that these motivations are impactful to donors.

As additional levels of coding were added to each of the twelve main motivations, the differences between donors became apparent. The number and type of overarching factors motivating giving decisions were homogenous, but became increasingly heterogenous with each additional level of coding. This is discussed further in the following section.
Research Question 1, Sub-Question 1

Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

Economic Factors

Economic motivations were the least commonly referenced motivations compared to the other two types of motivations. Economic motivation references made up 21.54% of the total motivation references. There were three overarching economic motivations identified: a) financial considerations, b) opportunity cost, and c) tax implications.

One of the main themes uncovered through coding of “Financial Considerations” was the donors’ decision-making processes about how much money to give. A slight majority of donors decided how much money they would give without input from the case study institution. The other donors consulted with the case study institution about the type of impact they wanted to have with their gift, and then committed to give the amount that would achieve that impact. The gifts from donors who decided on the impact before amount were the largest gifts in this study. This provides preliminary evidence that donors may give more when they focus on the impact of their giving rather than the amount that they want to spend.

The second theme under “Financial Considerations” was the reasons for donors increasing their giving to the case study institution. All subjects started out with small gifts to the school that increased over a varying number of years. This provides evidence that individuals will gradually become major gift donors over time. Five of the seven research subjects said that they increased their gifts to the case study institution because they were asked to do so, while the other two donors decided to increase their giving as their incomes increased. Three of the five donors who increased their giving when asked explicitly identified themselves as “financially well-off.” This indicates
that “when” and “how much” donors give is a result of fundraising efforts. It also indicates that most donors will not increase their giving just because they have the financial capacity to do so.

An interesting theme of “Financial Considerations” was the influence of matching gifts. Some companies offer their employees a benefit referred to as a "matching gift." When an employee of one of these companies makes a gift to a charitable organization, their employer will give a proportionate amount to the same nonprofit on the employee's behalf. Only two donors mentioned that they had access to matching funds, though subjects were not specifically asked about this topic. Both donors who utilized matching funds said that the availability of these matching gifts positively influenced their giving decisions. They indicated that they were able to essentially double their impacts without a commensurate impact on their finances. Both donors also said that they considered company-imposed deadlines for their matching gifts when deciding about the timing of their personal gifts to the case study institution. Given the strong impact of matching gifts on the decisions of all subjects referencing them, it’s reasonable to conclude that matching gifts may positively impact donors’ giving decisions.

All donors in this study considered the opportunity costs of their gifts. The two opportunity costs cited by donors were: a) individual and family expenses, and b) other charitable organizations. I found that donors decisions about how much to give, when to give, and how to give were largely influenced by one or both of these opportunity costs.

Ultimately, I was able to conclude that tax implications did not influence the giving decisions of the donors in this study. Only four of the seven subjects referenced tax implications during their interviews. Two explicitly said that they did not consider tax implications in their giving decisions. The other two said that they did consider the tax implications of their gifts, but that those implications did not significantly influence their giving decisions. While donors may
think about the tax implications of their gifts, it appears that they don’t substantially revise their giving decisions based on those implications. However, it’s important to note that the gifts being studied were between $25,000 and $100,000. Tax implications could be more impactful on donors making larger gifts. Further research would be needed to explore this topic.

**Psychological Factors**

Psychological motivations were the most commonly referenced motivations compared to economic and sociological motivations. Psychological motivations accounted for 46.75% of the 246 total coded motivation references. There were five psychological motivations identified: a) appreciation, b) affinity, c) recognition, d) warm glow, and e) obligation.

Appreciation was, by far, the most commonly referenced motivation, and was referenced by all seven donors. This provides evidence that appreciation may be the most important motivator for giving from this population. Donors identified three categories of the things for which they had an appreciation: a) affordability and scholarship, b) professional readiness and success, and c) faculty/staff members from the case study institution. More than half of the donors in this study expressed an appreciation for the affordability of the case study institution while they were students, and/or the scholarships they received from the case study institution. Almost all of the subjects expressed an appreciation for the fact that the case study institution gave them the opportunities to be successful professionally. Lastly, four of the seven subjects referenced an appreciation for faculty or staff members at the case study institution. All four were appreciative for the faculty/staff members because they helped to prepare the donors for professional success. Therefore, appreciation for faculty/staff members overlapped with an appreciation for professional readiness and success. My analysis of the appreciation motivation revealed a theme relating to social mobility. The combination of the three categories of appreciation led me to conclude that
the donors in this study were ultimately appreciative of their abilities to improve their socioeconomic statuses, and credited that social mobility to the education and experiences they received from the case study institution. This appeared to be the most powerful motivator of donors’ philanthropy.

The second most commonly referenced motivation in the study was an affinity for the case study institution. This indicates that affinity is one of the most important motivators of donors’ giving. There were two types of affinity that were referenced: a) general affinity, and b) student experiences. All donors expressed a general affinity for the case study institution, which indicates that donors will all have some level of affinity for organizations to which they give. Only two donors referenced the case study institution’s sports teams when talking about their connections to the school. Since only two of the seven donors expressed these feelings of affinity, I cannot conclude that sports teams influence alumni giving. However, it’s important to note that the case study institution is not an athletics-focused university, and they do not compete at a high level. This may be different in higher education institutions with strong sports programming.

More than half of the donor subjects felt that part of their affinity for the case study institution was a result of their positive student experiences. They discussed two types of student experiences: a) non-academic, and b) academic. These were not mutually exclusive, but still indicate that donors may consider their positive student experiences when making giving decisions. I expected that donors would not reference negative student experiences. It’s important to recognize that negative student experiences could have a negative impact on individuals’ giving to their alma maters, but I cannot conclude this because subjects’ inclusion in this study was predicated on them making a major gift to their alma mater.
All donors considered the role of recognition when deciding about their major named gifts. The majority said that they did care about the recognition they would receive, indicating that offering naming opportunities of physical structures is an effective motivator. Most of these donors expressed a desire to receive recognition from the case study institution for their gifts, and said that they enjoyed how they were treated specially during the solicitation process. This provides evidence that donors seeking recognition for their gifts want the case study institution to show great appreciation to the donors for their generosity.

Two donors specifically decided to disregard the recognition component when making decisions about their gifts. Both donors said that they decided on the amount and impact of their gifts and didn’t alter those decisions based on the recognition. It’s important to note that both donors expressed negative opinions about those donors who seek recognition for their gifts. Yet the donors could have chosen to forego the public recognition of their gifts by choosing a different gift purpose or by giving anonymously. This is interesting because it provides some evidence that donors may hide their interest in naming physical structures because they feel that others will perceive them as egotistical.

The warm glow effect was one of the least commonly referenced motivations. While these donors did feel “warm” about giving, they only seemed to feel this way because they felt an affinity toward the case study institution. Their warmth toward their giving to the case study institution also seemed to be a result of their appreciation for their alma mater. This provides evidence that the warm glow effect, as it’s traditionally defined, is only an important motivation because of other psychological motivations (appreciation and affinity).

Obligation was one of the least commonly referenced motivations. The three donors who did reference obligation did so using indifferent language. This indicates that obligation is an
ineffective motivator for giving. Two of the three donors said that they felt guilty for not giving to the case study institution, so they felt obligated to do so. One donor felt indebted to the solicitor of the gift, so felt he had to say “yes” to the solicitation. Since no other subjects made any references to this type of obligation, I cannot draw any conclusions. Lastly, two donors said that they received awards/honors from the case study institution, which caused them to feel obligated to give more. Due to the small number of donors and references of the obligation motivation, I was able to conclude that donors usually do not give because of guilt, indebtedness to solicitors, or in exchange for awards/honors.

**Sociological Factors**

Sociological motivations were neither the most nor least commonly referenced motivations. Sociological motivation references made up 31.71% of the total coded motivation references. There were four sociological motivations identified: a) making an impact, b) engagement, c) prestige/signaling wealth/social status, and d) legacy.

All donors in the study made it clear that they wanted to have an impact with their philanthropy. I was able to identify three categories of impact that donors wished to achieve: a) impact individuals like the donor, b) push personal initiatives, and c) support institutional priorities. More than half of the donors expressed a desire to use their philanthropy to support current students who remind the donors of themselves. However, only one donor felt that he could achieve this through his gift for a named physical structure. The other donors shared that they made separate gifts to the case study institution to fund scholarships for students who met the specific criteria making them similar to the donors. This provides evidence that this is not an effective motivation for major named gifts of physical spaces, but may be effective for gifts to fund scholarships.
I was able to conclude that all donors wanted to make an impact with their gifts either by pushing their personal initiatives or by supporting institutional priorities. These two categories of impact were mutually exclusive. The donors who wanted to push their individual initiatives through philanthropy all identified problems that they felt were significant, and used their gifts to fund the solutions that they felt would solve those problems. On the other hand, the donors who wanted to make an impact by supporting institutional priorities relied on their respective Development Officers to communicate the needs of the case study institution, and then decided on the impact they wanted to have based on those needs.

Engagement was one of the most commonly referenced motivations, indicating that it was one of the most important influencers of donors’ giving decisions. I was able to identify two categories of engagement: a) engagement as alumni, and b) engagement as students. The engagement as alumni seemed to be more important than engagement as students. All seven donors referenced their engagement as alumni. School-sponsored alumni events appeared to be an influencer of most donors’ giving decisions. About half of the donors were engaged as alumni through volunteer roles, which had a strong impact on their giving decisions.

The donors who referenced their engagement as students all discussed their external or supplemental non-academic experiences (i.e. internships). This indicates that students who participate in activities beyond the usual academic curriculum may have stronger feelings of engagement which, in turn, may influence their future giving decisions.

More than half of the donors in this study made references to prestige, signaling wealth, and/or their social statuses. Three of these donors explicitly said that their ego was a factor in their decisions to make major named gifts. All three of these donors said that they would not admit the role of their ego to anyone else, and only did so because their interviews were confidential. This
provides preliminary evidence that “ego” is a factor motivating major named gifts of physical spaces. There is also evidence that donors actively try to conceal this motivation. Three donors also indicated that their giving decisions were influenced by the perceptions of other alumni. They all wanted to be perceived by other alumni as successful and generous. Interestingly, they did not seem to care about the opinions of the general public or alumni body. They were only concerned with the perceptions of alumni who they knew, even if they had only briefly met those alumni once. Lastly, two donors were given the opportunity to serve as guest lecturers in classes for current students at the case study institution. Both were extremely enthusiastic about these experiences and stressed how important they felt that they were viewed as successful enough to lecture students. This provides evidence that donors can be motivated to give when the case study institution makes them feel important and successful.

Only three of the seven donors in my study referenced legacy as a motivation for their giving. All three donors expressed a desire to be remembered and recognized for their generosity after their deaths. These donors all talked about their family members when discussing their desired legacies, but did not mention other people. The naming of physical structures provided a mechanism for these donors to create a lasting legacy for their families to be remembered and recognized in the future. Therefore, there is evidence to support the conclusion that the donors who are motivated by leaving a legacy do so because of their families. It is unknown if the remaining four donors who did not reference legacy had additional family members, which may be a reason for legacy being one of the least commonly referenced motivations for giving.
Research Question 2

What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?

In my study of solicitation processes, I found it surprising that every donor was able to recall the specific facts and events of the solicitation processes of their respective major named gifts. Donors did not know the interview questions prior to their scheduled interviews, nor did they have access to records about the details of their solicitation processes. The information from donors was corroborated by their respective Development Officers. This provides compelling evidence that donors may think of their gifts, and the solicitation processes of those gifts, as significant life events.

The information about the solicitation processes recounted by Development Officer-Donor pairings revealed themes falling into four distinct categories corresponding with four steps of solicitation processes: a) Qualification, b) Cultivation, c) Solicitation, and d) Stewardship.

The qualification category included any themes related to: a) actions leading up to, and including, the first meeting between Development Officer and Donor, and b) efforts by the Development Officer to determine Donor’s inclination or capacity for giving to Case Study Institution. In all but one Development Officer-Donor pairing, the Development Officer was the first fundraising employee from the case study institution to contact their respective donors. The donors felt excited about being contacted for the first time, and it set the tone for positive relationships.

All Development Officers demonstrated that they knew personal information about their respective donors. Examples include: names and career paths of donors’ children, how donors met their spouses, etc. The donors seemed to really appreciate that their respective Development Officers knew personal information about them. This indicates that it may be important for
Development Officers to learn about donors’ personal lives, and demonstrate that knowledge to their respective donors.

The next stage of the solicitation process is cultivation. The cultivation category included any themes related to: a) actions leading up to gift solicitation, and b) relationship-building between Donor and Development Officer/Case Study Institution. My study revealed that there are two components of the cultivation phase: a) relationship-building between donor and case study institution, and b) relationship-building between donor and Development Officer. I found that these two components took place simultaneously, and were equally important to the solicitation processes.

In all cases, there was a strong bond between Development Officers and their respective donors. The donors all valued these relationships and felt that it contributed to their giving decisions. This indicates that donors may make positive giving decisions when there is a strong relationship with their Development Officer.

The average amount of time that Development Officers worked with their respective donors before they made their major named gifts was approximately two years. This indicates that the relationship-building-focused cultivation stage is a time-consuming process. It may take over two years to properly cultivate a donor. It’s important to note that none of the donors in this study became major gift donors until they were asked by their respective Development Officers. This provides evidence that it may take an average of two years working with a Development Officer to upgrade an annual donor to a major gift donor.

The solicitation category included any themes related to: a) “the ask,” and b) factors related to Donor’s decision in response to “the ask.” All Development Officers solicited their respective prospects during one-on-one meetings. All Development Officer-Donor pairings agreed that they
had talked about the subject of giving prior to the formal ask, but usually did not talk about the gift specifics until the actual solicitation. Donors were not surprised by the solicitations, and agreed to make the gifts quickly and without any significant objections. This indicates that donors may respond positively when the formal asks are expected.

The fact that donors quickly agreed to the gift solicitations could also indicate that they were financially capable of giving a larger gift. One would expect that donors would take more time to consider gifts that would be large enough to impact their financial statuses. Most donors in this study indicated that their gifts did not have a significant impact on their financial statuses. This is supported by the fact that most of the donors in this study were given a “menu” of giving options for various amounts which they were asked to choose from. All but one of these donors chose to give the minimum amount that would still provide them with the naming rights to physical structures. This provides evidence that naming opportunities may provide an incentive for donors to give more than they initially intended to give. The largest gifts in this study were solicited for a specific amount, rather than provided with a menu of options. This provides evidence that donors may give more when they are asked to do so.

The final stage of the solicitation process is the stewardship phase. The stewardship category included any themes related to: a) actions after the gift commitment is made, and b) efforts to make Donor feel recognized/appreciated for their gift. My study revealed that donors received two types of stewardship: a) formal, and b) informal. The formal stewardship is governed by specific, uniform procedures. For example, donors will receive an acknowledgement letter a specific number of days from their initial commitment. There were also events to which only donors received invitations. Formal stewardship was managed by the University Advancement division, but Development Officers were not involved. When donors were asked if and how they
felt appreciated by the case study institution, none of them mentioned aspects of formal stewardship. This indicates that formal stewardship may not achieve its purpose of making donors feel recognized.

On the other hand, informal stewardship of donors was managed exclusively by their respective Development Officers. This type of stewardship was personalized for each individual donor. For example, Development Officers usually sent hand-written thank you notes to donors after they made their commitments. Most Development Officers provided informal stewardship by sending personalized communications to their donors. For example, some Development Officers sent their respective donors pictures of the plaques displaying their names on the physical spaces named with their gifts. Some Development Officers provided their respective donors with free tickets to sports games/events, and/or free merchandise from the case study institution. While most of the donors didn’t take advantage of these opportunities, they appreciated the offers. This indicates that informal, personalized stewardship is most effective. Development Officer-Donor pairings agreed that the personalized stewardship set the tone for continuing their relationships.

Research Question 2, Sub-Question 1

Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

Through the analysis of donor interviews I was able to identify four types of institutional partners who contributed to donors’ decisions to make their respective major named gifts: a) Development Officers, b) School Dean, c) Athletic Coaches, and d) Current Students.

The Development Officers were the most commonly referenced institutional partners. Every donor in this study stated that their respective Development Officers were their main (and sometimes only) contact at the case study institution. This provides evidence that there may only be one connection between the case study institution and major gift donors, making it essential to...
keep the Development Officer-Donor relationship intact. In all cases, the Development Officers were the ones who asked for and secured the major named gift commitments. In the Research Question 1 Findings section, I indicated that many donors’ motivations were a result of strong feelings they had toward institutional partners. While these donors built strong relationships with their respective Development Officers, they never mentioned those Development Officers when talking about their strongest motivations for giving (i.e. Appreciation). This indicates that a fundraising employee may serve as a donor’s main contact person, but they may never achieve the same level of influence over donors’ giving decisions as other non-fundraising institutional partners.

For five of the donors in the study, a School Dean was involved with the solicitation processes. The School Dean was involved because the solicitations were made as part of a specific fundraising campaign. Of these donors, two stated that the School Dean was the main reason that they made their major named gifts.

Athletic Coaches were involved in the solicitation processes of several donors. These donors met one or more Athletic Coach during formal campus visits and tours, and stated that those meetings positively impacted their giving decisions. The donors said that they informally kept in touch with the athletic coaches, but that their respective Development Officers were unaware of these connections. This provides preliminary evidence that donors enjoy being connected with non-fundraising institutional partners, and these relationships may impact their giving decisions.

Lastly, only two donors met current students of the case study institution during the solicitation processes for their major named gifts. However, both these donors spoke very positively of these experiences, and stated that they positively impacted their giving decisions.
This demonstrates that donors may make more positive giving decisions when they get to meet the potential beneficiaries of their gifts.

**Research Question 2, Sub-Question 2**

*What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?*

There were two main solicitation process events that donors referenced as contributing factors in their decision-making processes for their respective major named gifts: a) specific fundraising campaign, and b) campus visits. I also identified two milestones impacting the donors in this study. These milestones refer to donors’ decisions on whether or not to involve the following two parties: a) spouse, and/or b) professional advisors.

Five of the donors in my study had been solicited for their major named gifts as part of the same fundraising campaign. A fundraising campaign is an organized, structured effort to raise a specific amount of money for specific purposes within a specified time frame. All of these donors solicited in support of this campaign specifically referenced it when discussing their decision-making processes for their major named gifts. I found that this campaign positively impacted the following giving decisions for these donors: a) when to give, b) how much to give, and c) to which purpose to give. This indicates that donors may be energized to give as part of a collective campaign for a specific purpose. These donors also expressed a clear understanding of the fundraising campaign priorities and how their donations would be utilized. These points were, according to the five donors, communicated by their respective Development Officers during the solicitation processes. This provides evidence that Development Officers are responsible for educating donors about specific campaigns.

Campus visits were also identified as meaningful events in the solicitation processes. Most donors made a formal visit to the case study institution during their solicitation processes. These
formal visits were arranged by the donors’ respective Development Officers, and all included formal tours of the campus and/or the potential named spaces. Two Development Officers arranged for their two respective donors to serve as guest lecturers during their visits to campus. They were invited to speak to students about specific topics in their areas of expertise. Both of these donors spoke enthusiastically about their experiences as guest lecturers and said that it had a positive impact on their giving decisions. They both expressed a desire to serve as guest lecturers again.

Some campus visits included meetings with institutional partners. Donors felt positively about meeting non-fundraising institutional partners, which translated to their attitudes about giving. The previous sub-question addressed the role of institutional partners in the solicitation processes of donors. It was the responsibility of the Development Officers to choose whether or not to involve certain institutional partners, if any, in the solicitation processes of their respective donors. However, the donors chose whether or not to involve other non-affiliated individuals in their decision-making processes.

First, six of the seven donor subjects made decisions about the involvement of their spouses. The other donor subject had never been married. The six married donors chose to involve their spouses minimally in their solicitation processes and giving decisions. This provides evidence that the donors in this study acted as the “deciders” and made conscious choices to not include their spouses in the solicitation processes.

The same six married donors chose not to involve any professional advisors in their decision-making processes. Half of these donors said that they held professional positions in or related to the field of finance, so they felt qualified to review their own giving decisions. The other three donors said that they did not consult any professional advisors because they had already
decided to make their respective gifts. The seventh donor stated that he chose to consult two advisors—his lawyer, and a fundraising professional from a different institution. He said that he simply asked them to review the language of his gift agreement, but did not make any revisions to his giving decisions.

**Research Question 2, Sub-Question 3**

*What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?*

Even though the major named gift commitments being studied were made between three and ten years ago, all donors easily recalled the details of the solicitation processes. All but one Development Officer also recalled the solicitation processes of their respective donors. The interviews captured two types of information about the solicitation processes: a) objective facts and the events that took place, and b) subjective perceptions about donors’ feelings and motivations.

It’s important to note that Development Officers had access to the case study institution’s donor database before, during, and after their interviews. This database contained biographical information, giving information, and notes about meetings with each donor. The Development Officers received the interview instrument prior to their scheduled interviews. Therefore, I proceeded on the assumption that the Development Officers accurately reported the objective facts and events of the solicitation processes of their respective donors.

All Development Officer-Donor pairings agreed on the objective facts and the events that took place during the respective solicitation processes. Donor subjects did not have substantial problems recalling information about the solicitation processes, nor did they contradict the objective facts and events reported by their respective Development Officers. Donors did not know
the interview questions prior to their scheduled interviews, nor did they have access to records about the details of their solicitation processes.

The second type of information gathered was related to the subjective perceptions about donors’ feelings and motivations. Since every donor demonstrated a detailed recollection of the objective facts and events of their solicitation processes, I proceeded with the assumption that they accurately reported their feelings and motivations during the respective solicitation processes. Development Officers had access to the case study institution’s donor database which housed their notes about the solicitation processes. These notes would have been written by the Development Officer subjects at the time of the solicitation processes. Therefore, I proceeded with the assumption that they reported the information that they discovered and used at the time of the solicitation processes of their respective donors. The subjective information about the solicitation processes recounted by Development Officer-Donor pairings revealed the differences discussed below.

All donors provided detailed information about their feelings and motivations, which were discussed in the previous section on Research Question 1 Findings. However, my study revealed that the Development Officers did not seem to have a sufficient understanding of why donors made their giving decisions related to the gifts being studied. When Development Officers were asked to name all of the factors that motivated their respective donors’ major named gifts, they were mostly unable to correctly do so. They could only name between one and four motivations for each of their respective donors.

This provides evidence that donors may say “yes” to solicitations even when their respective Development Officers don’t know their giving motivations. Since most donors chose from a menu of giving options, it’s possible that their respective Development Officers did not
need to understand their motivations. Since most donors likely gave less that they were financially capable of giving, it’s reasonable to conclude that they could have been persuaded to give more by their respective Development Officers if those Development Officers understood their philanthropic motivations.

One of the most important factors influencing donors’ giving decisions was their experiences when they were students. As previously discussed, the donors in this study had positive experiences as students, which influenced many factors in their giving decisions. For this reason, it was surprising that the Development Officers didn’t seem to know anything about their respective donors’ student experiences. This provides evidence that Development Officers may not be aware of the most important factors in donors’ giving decisions.

Development Officers and donors agreed that the relationship between the donors and the case study institution was a major influencer of the donors’ giving decisions. However, the Development Officers stressed that alumni engagement was the main reason for donors’ giving while donors identified “engagement” as the fifth most important factor. This provides additional evidence that Development Officers were not aware of their respective donors’ motivations. The donors had also identified school-sponsored alumni events and guest lecturing of students as two of the most important components of their alumni engagement. Therefore, it was surprising that the Development Officers did not understand the role of these events in donors’ giving decisions. This further supports the finding that Development Officers may not understand the factors that have the greatest influence on donors giving.

As discussed in the previous sections, many of the donors had a relationship with the case study institution because of faculty and/or staff members who worked there. The donors felt very strongly about these connections, and all kept in touch with those faculty/staff members. In most
cases, the Development Officers were unaware of these relationships and did not involve these faculty/staff members in their solicitation processes.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1 Findings

Figure 13 below provides a summary of the findings for the first research question. Figure 14 provides a summary of the findings for the first sub-question, which are intended to answer the first research question.

Figure 13: Research Question 1 Summary of Findings

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:
What are the motivations that contribute to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- Donors make at least six decisions about their charitable giving: a) whether or not to give, b) how much to give, c) when to give, d) how to give, e) to which organization to give, and f) to which purpose to give
- Economic motivations factor into donors’ decisions about whether or not to give, how much to give, when to give, and how to give
- Psychological motivations factor into donors’ decisions about to which organization to give
- Sociological motivations factor into donors’ decisions about to which purpose to give
- Donors are motivated by a variety of factors made up of at least two economic, two psychological, and two sociological factors
- Psychological factors seem to be the most important motivations of donors’ giving decisions
- Sociological factors seem to be the second most important motivations of donors’ giving decisions
- Economic factors seem to be the least important motivations of donors’ giving decisions
- There are twelve main overarching motivations that influence donors’ giving decisions
- Donors consider between nine and eleven overarching factors when making their giving decisions
- There is consistency in number and type of motivations among donors
- As the main motivations of donors are broken down into themes, diversity increases in terms of number and type of sub-motivations
- All donors consider the following factors: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, and g) Opportunity Cost
- While not their main motivations, donors consider between two and four of the following factors in their giving decisions: a) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, b) Warm Glow, c) Legacy, d) Obligation, e) Tax Implications
RESEARCH QUESTION 1, SUB-QUESTION 1:
Which economic, psychological, and sociological factors lead to alumni donors' decisions to name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters?

- There are two mutually exclusive ways that donors decide how much money to give to an organization: a) by allocating a certain amount of their money available to gift, or b) by deciding on the impact they want their gift to have and then giving the amount that will achieve that impact (Economic)
- Donors who consider impact before money give more than donors who consider money first (Economic)
- Donors start with small gifts to an institution before giving major gifts (Economic)
- Donors decide when and how they will give based on the fundraising efforts of Development Officers (Economic)
- Donors do not increase their giving simply because their income increases (Economic)
- Access to matching gifts may positively impact donors’ decisions to give (Economic)
- Decisions about how much to give, when to give, and how to give are influenced by the consideration of one or both of the following opportunity costs: a) individual and family expenses, and/or b) giving to other charitable organizations (Economic)
- Tax implications do not influence the giving decisions of donors (Economic)
- Appreciation is the most important motivator, specifically appreciation for social mobility (Psychological)
- Donors who are motivated by appreciation have an appreciation for one or more of the following factors: a) affordability or scholarship, b) professional readiness and success, and/or c) faculty/staff (Psychological)
- Affinity is the second most important motivator for donors (Psychological)
- All donors have a general affinity for the institution to which they give (Psychological)
- Sports teams may be a reason for donors’ affinities to their alma maters (Psychological)
- Positive student experiences may have a positive impact on donors’ giving decisions (Psychological)
- Recognition is an effective motivator for donors (Psychological)
- Donors who are motivated by recognition want special treatment from their alma maters (Psychological)
- Donors may hide that they were motivated by recognition because they don’t want to be perceived as egotistical (Psychological)
- The warm glow effect is only evident because donors are motivated by appreciation and affinity (Psychological)
- Warm glow is not an effective motivator (Psychological)
- Obligation is not an effective motivator (Psychological)
- Donors generally will not make gifts out of guilt, indebtedness to solicitor, or because they received awards/honors (Psychological)
- Alumni engagement through school-sponsored events and/or volunteer roles positively impact donors’ decisions to give to their alma maters (Sociological)
- Students who are engaged through additional non-academic experiences consider this when deciding to which organization they will give (Sociological)
- All donors want to make an impact with their philanthropy that will achieve one or more of the following: a) affect individuals like donor, b) push individual initiatives, and/or c) support institutional priorities (Sociological)
- Donors who want to make an impact on individuals like themselves are unlikely to fund physical spaces, but may fund scholarships (Sociological)
- All donors want to make an impact with their philanthropy that will either push their individual priorities, or will support the institution’s priorities (Sociological)
- Ego is a factor that motivates donors to make major named gifts of physical spaces, but they may try to conceal this motivation from others (Sociological)
- Donors seek social recognition through their gifts because they want other alumni who they know to view them as successful and generous (Sociological)
- Donors who are invited to be guest lecturers to current students feel important doing this which, in turn, positively impacts their giving decisions (Sociological)
- Donors who are motivated by leaving a legacy do so because of their families (Sociological)
**Research Question 2 Findings**

Figure 15 below provides a summary of the findings for the second research question. Figures 16, 17, and 18 provide summaries of the findings for the first, second, and third sub-questions (respectively), which are intended to answer the second research question.

**Figure 15: Research Question 2 Summary of Findings**

### RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

**What relationship exists between the solicitation process and a donor’s decision to name a physical structure with a major gift to their alma mater?**

- Donors view their major named gifts as significant events in their lives
- The relationship-building process between Development Officers and donors begins with the first contact
- It may be important that Development Officers learn about their donors’ personal lives, and demonstrate that knowledge to their donors
- Relationship-building between donors and institutions, and relationship-building between donors and Development Officers should occur simultaneously in the cultivation stage, and are equally important in the solicitation process
- A strong relationship between Development Officers and donors may positively influence donors’ giving decisions
- On average, Development Officers worked with donors for two years before donors made their major named gifts
- It may take a Development Officer an average of two years working with an annual donor to upgrade them to a major gift donor
- Donors may respond positively when they expect the formal solicitation
- Providing donors with menus of giving options may result in them choosing the minimum level
- Naming opportunities for physical structures provide an incentive for donors to give more
- Formal stewardship may not be meaningful to donors
- Even if donors don’t accept complimentary tickets to events and/or free merchandise, the offers make them feel appreciated
- Informal and personalized stewardship is most meaningful to donors, and may lead to continued relationships with the institution and Development Officers
RESEARCH QUESTION 2, SUB-QUESTION 1:
Who are the institutional partners that contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

- Development Officers are usually donors’ main contacts at their alma maters,
- A fundraising employee may serve as a donor’s main contact person, but they may never achieve the same level of influence over donors’ giving decisions as other non-fundraising institutional partners
- Development Officers may be the one connection between institutions and major gift donors, making it essential to keep the Development Officer-Donor relationships intact
- School Deans’ involvement in solicitation processes may positively affect donors’ giving decisions
- Involvement of Athletic Coaches in solicitation processes may positively affect donors’ giving decisions
- Donors seem to enjoy being connected with non-fundraising institutional partners, even informally, and these relationships may positively impact their giving decisions
- Donors may make more positive giving decisions when they get to meet the potential beneficiaries of their gifts.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2, SUB-QUESTION 2:
What incidents and milestones in the solicitation process contribute to alumni donors’ decisions to name physical structures at their alma maters?

- Donors may be energized to give as part of a collective campaign for a specific purpose
- Campaigns may positively impact the following giving decisions for these donors: a) when to give, b) how much to give, and c) to which purpose to give
- Development Officers are responsible for educating donors about specific campaigns
- Donors may feel positively about meeting non-fundraising institutional partners during campus visits, and these may positively affect their giving decisions
- Donors’ giving decisions are positively affected when they serve as guest lecturers on campus
- One spouse will generally serve as the “decider” of philanthropic decisions, and will choose not to involve the other spouse, beyond minimally, in their solicitation process
- Donors working in the field of finance/business may feel that they are qualified to evaluate their own giving decisions without consulting with professional advisors
- Donors may choose not to involve professional advisors in the solicitation processes if they have already made their six giving decisions
RESEARCH QUESTION 2, SUB-QUESTION 3:
What differences exist between the Development Officer’s and the donor’s recollections of the solicitation process?

- Development Officers may not understand why donors made their giving decisions
- Development Officers may overemphasize the importance of alumni engagement
- Development Officers may not understand the most important influencers of donors’ relationships with their alma maters
- Development Officers may be unaware that donors keep in touch with certain faculty/staff members, and may not realize the impact of these faculty/staff members on donors’ giving decisions
- Development Officers may not know about donors’ student experiences, even though these experiences significantly impacted donors’ giving motivations
- Donors will give more when they are asked to do so
- Donors may commit to gift solicitations even when their Development Officers don’t understand their giving motivations
- Donors may give more when Development Officers understand their motivations

Relationship to the Literature

Ultimately, all of my findings contribute new knowledge to the existing literature because no other study has specifically researched alumni donors who name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters. However, the larger body of literature contains research on donor populations that include this group. Therefore, I was able to compare their findings to my own.

Population

Different institutions define a “major gift” differently based on the amount of the gift, the timeframe in which the donor pays, and how the donor gives (lifetime giving vs. planned gift). Most higher education institutions with mature fundraising operations classify a “major gift” as a commitment of $100,000 or more, paid over five years during the donor’s lifetime. The case study institution in my study defined a “major gift” as “any commitment of $25,000 or more that is paid in full within 5 years of the initial gift commitment.” This amount is consistent with the two schools
included in Barascout’s (2012) study of major gift donors to higher education schools of music, and one of the schools included in King’s (2005) study of major gift donors to higher education.

**Donor Motivations**

While there has been significant research on donor motivations, no study has found one single donor characteristic that solely accounts for a donor’s decision to give or not to give. Rather, there are a multitude of factors that influence every donor’s decision to give (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007; Prince and File, 1994; Ostrower, 1995; Burk, 2013). My findings support the current research, as I found that donors were motivated by a number of factors made up of at least two economic factors, two psychological factors, and two sociological factors. I found that donors considered between nine and eleven overarching factors when making their giving decisions. My study identified twelve main overarching motivations that influenced all donors’ giving decisions: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, and g) Opportunity Cost. Additionally, all donors considered between two and four of the following motivations: a) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, b) Warm Glow, c) Legacy, d) Obligation, e) Tax Implications. The relationship between these motivations and the existing literature is explored in the following sections.

**Economic Motivations**

**Financial Considerations**

Panas (1984) found that donors’ need to share their wealth, through philanthropy, grows in proportion to their own financial growth (pg. 44). However, only two subjects in my study said that they increased their giving when their income increased.
Flandez (2012) found that 60% of donors said that they budget for their giving at the beginning of the year. This is consistent with my study which found that about half of the donors decided how much they were going to give based on their budgeting. Flandez (2012) also found that 35% of the donors who budget their giving will give more than they planned. Of those donors who gave more than they budgeted, 25% said that they were persuaded to do so by a fundraising employee. My study didn’t support these findings. The donors who said that they budgeted their giving did not increase beyond what they budgeted.

Surprisingly, no empirical research exists about the impact of matching funds on donors’ giving decisions. In my study, two donors had access to matching funds from their employers. Both stated that the matching gifts positively influenced their giving decisions because it enabled them to double their philanthropic impact without affecting their finances commensurately.

My study found that donors either choose the amount they want to give before the gift purpose, or the gift purpose before the amount. In all cases, the donors in my study who decided on the gift purpose first gave larger gifts than the donors who decided on the gift amount first. This directly conflicts with Flandez’s (2012) findings which stated that those who budget their giving amounts usually give more than those donors who do not budget.

Drezner (2006) conducted research on the relationship between economic cycles and philanthropic giving. He found that giving to higher education is tightly connected to the economy and, specifically, to the stock market. Though I did not specifically ask donor subjects about the impact of the stock market on their giving decisions, no donors in my study mentioned the stock market when discussing their financial considerations. However, they all mentioned that they had to consider their availability of wealth and financial resources when making their giving decisions.
Opportunity Cost

In my study, donors identified two opportunity costs for their gifts: a) individual and family expenses, and/or b) giving to other charities. No studies specifically research the trade-off between giving and individual/family expenses. Rather, most studies seem to proceed with the assumption that a trade-off exists and that donors will financially take care of themselves and their families before than making charitable gifts.

There is a significant amount of literature that examines how donors choose which organizations to which they will give (Breeze, 2010; Odendahl, 1990; Panas, 1984). These studies don’t explicitly refer to the opportunity cost of giving to one charity over another. Instead, they focus on the factors that determine why a donor gives to a specific charity, and why a donor may choose not to give to a specific charity. The research views these two concepts separately. In my study, however, donors explicitly stated that there was a trade-off between their gifts to the case study institution and gifts to other charities. This supports Flandez’s (2012) finding that many donors will budget a specific amount of money for charitable giving at the beginning of the year, and will decide what portions to give to which organizations. Giving a bigger portion to one organization decreases the portion available to give to other organizations.

Tax Implications

There are two conflicting perspectives about the impact of tax implications on donors’ giving behaviors. First, some researchers find that tax benefits positively impact donors’ giving. Drennan (2012) stated that tax benefits influence the giving decisions of naming donors. Holmes (2009) found that wealth, in conjunction with a tax deduction, positively influenced alumni giving. Prince and File (1994) found that tax avoidance alone was a powerful motivator to more than 15% of wealthy donors, and a significant stimulus to their philanthropic behavior. They identified a
group of “Investors” as donors who “give with one eye on the cause of the nonprofit and one eye on the personal tax and estate consequences.”

Other researchers found that tax implications do not substantially influence donors. Panas (1984) stated, “I am convinced that people do not give for tax reasons, although if there is an advantage, that is helpful” (pg. 50). Frantzreb (1991) suggested that tax considerations are very seldom the primary reason for giving. My study supported these researchers’ conclusions that tax implications do not influence the giving decisions of donors. It is important to note that the gifts that I studied were relatively small for major gifts. Therefore, the tax benefits may have been negligible to the donors in my study, which could account for them not considering tax implications in their giving decisions.

**Psychological Motivations**

**Appreciation and Obligation**

The literature on “obligation” and “appreciation” motivations for giving seem to be intertwined. In my study, I found that there were significant differences between these two motivations. Appreciation was, by far, the most referenced motivation for giving while obligation was the second least referenced motivation.

There is little empirical research that specifically addresses “appreciation” as a motivation for giving. Instead, giving as an expression of gratitude is usually grouped with, and referred to as, “obligation.” Panas (1984) and Prince and File (1994) found that donors often feel grateful for the education they received, and credit their successes to their alma maters. Some donors give as a way to express their gratitude for scholarships they received as students which enabled them to attend college. My study supports these findings. I found that donors are motivated by an appreciation for one or more of the following factors: a) affordability or scholarship, b)
professional readiness and success, and/or c) faculty or staff members. Donors were ultimately appreciative that they were able to improve their socioeconomic statuses because of the education and experiences they received from the case study institution.

Unlike the appreciation motivation, I found that obligation was focused on repayment and/or feelings of guilt. Prince and File (1994) identified a group of major donors called “Repayers.” These donors give back because they have received something from an organization, appear to be acutely aware of how others have helped them, and they feel a specific and particular obligation to repay (pg. 82). Ostrower (1995) and King (2005) both found that alumni donors are largely fueled to give by feelings of indebtedness and desire to repay their alma maters. My study found that donors were generally not motivated by feelings of obligation, which conflicts with the existing research.

**Affinity**

Panas (2009) found that one of the most commonly referenced motivations for giving is an affinity for the organization or belief in their mission. King (2005) and Barascout (2012) both found this to be the case in their studies, as well. My study supports these findings, as I found that an affinity for the case study institution was the second most commonly referenced motivator for donors. All of the donors in my study had a general affinity for their alma mater, which was also the case in King’s (2005) and Barascout’s (2012) studies.

**Recognition**

Panas (1984) conducted interviews with million-dollar donors. Some of these donors had physical structures named for them in exchange for their gifts. He found that it meant a great deal to this group to have others know what they had done. My findings support Panas’ (1984), as I found that recognition was an effective motivator of major named gifts. Panas (1984) also found
that these donors felt that the public recognition for their gifts would inspire others to give. None of the donors in my study expressed a desire to motivate others with their gifts, nor did they express that they were motivated to give by the recognition of others’ gifts. However, it’s important to note that the recognition for the million-dollar gifts studied by Panas (1984) would likely be grander than the smaller gifts in my study.

Prince and File (1994) classified most alumni donors as “Repayers.” They found that “Repayers” generally believe that they have already benefitted from the relationship with their alma maters and, as a result, they do not usually seek the additional recognition (pg. 92). My findings were not consistent with those of Prince and File (1994), as I found that most donors wanted recognition. This is supported by the fact that most of the donors in my study were provided with a “menu” of giving options, and they all chose the gifts that would provide public recognition.

I also found that some donors may hide the fact that they were motivated by recognition because they didn’t want to be perceived as “egotistical.” However, the existing literature did not provide any research that supported or contradicted this finding.

**Warm Glow**

The warm glow effect is identified as one of the main motivations for giving by the existing literature. Andreoni (1989) and Harbaugh (1998b) refer to a sense of self-worth and internal satisfaction as a personal benefit that donors obtain from giving. Andreoni (1989) called it the “warm glow effect.” Barascout (2012) and Panas (1984) found that almost all of their research subjects expressed some sort of “warm glow effect” from their philanthropy. They stated that they enjoyed giving, supporting what they are passionate about, knowing they are helping others, wanting to share what they have, or simply inspiring others to give and understand “how good it feels” (pg. 88). Panas (1984) stated, “I am convinced that people do not give logically. Passion,
rather than reason, rules” (pg. 50). Prince and File (1994) identified a category of donors, known as “Altruists,” who say that they support nonprofits mainly because it gives their life a greater sense of purpose. They are fulfilled by giving and they feel that it should be done without thought of personal benefit (pg. 70).

The findings from my study contradict these findings from the existing literature. I found that the warm glow effect was not an effective motivator of the gifts in my study. Rather, the warm glow effect was only evident because donors were motivated by other psychological factors. For example, donors only derived internal satisfaction about their giving because they were giving to show their appreciation to the case study institution.

**Sociological Motivations**

**Making an Impact**

My study found that donors wanted to make an impact with their philanthropy that would achieve one or more of the following: a) affect individuals like donor, b) push individual initiatives, and/or c) support institutional priorities. I found that donors want to make an impact that will either push their individual priorities, or will support the institution’s priorities. Ostrower (1995) found that philanthropic gifts permit donors to direct their funds to institutions and causes with which they identify and which they feel are expressive of their priorities (pg. 101). The literature suggests that donors are more likely to push their individual priorities than to support institutional priorities. Some researchers suggest that major donors may give based on their personal values, beliefs, ideas, and goals, instead of giving based on the institution’s needs or the needs of the community (Cascione, 2003; Hueston, 1992; Mann, 2007). I found the opposite to be true. The donors in my study were more likely to support institutional priorities than to push their own initiatives through their philanthropy.
Engagement

Researchers have consistently shown that donors choose to make philanthropic contributions to organizations with which they are engaged (Ostrower, 1995; Panas, 1984; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Cascione, 2003; Burk, 2013). All seven donors in my study referenced their engagement as one of the top motivations for their respective gifts.

The top influencer of alumni engagement in my study was school-sponsored alumni events. However, this is not a topic that is explored in philanthropy research. Therefore, my findings could provide an initial foundation for future research.

None of the donors in my study served on the case study institution’s Board of Trustees. However, about half of the participants were engaged through other volunteer leadership roles. Ostrower (1995) found that wealthy donors were significantly more likely to give to organizations where they were on the Board of Directors or engaged in some other way, and they were likely to give significantly more to those organizations than organization where they weren’t engaged (pg. 29). Panas (1984) also found evidence that serving in volunteer leadership roles provided greater incentives for major giving. He stated that, “financial commitment follows personal and direct involvement” (pg. 26). My study supported these findings.

Cascione (2003) found that the donor’s relationship with an institution can be based on the undergraduate or graduate life experience of the alumnus/a, his/her curricular or co-curricular activities, and the impact of scholarships in his/her overall college experience (pg. 40). The findings from my study supported this conclusion. My research revealed that donors’ engagement as students had a positive impact on their giving decisions. Ostrower’s (1995) study of wealthy donors found that donors who made their largest gift to their alma maters spoke of the enduring personal relationships they formed as students. These relationships perpetuated their sense of
involvement and attachment to their school (pg. 88). Weerts and Ronca (2007) found that the most
giving alumni were not necessarily the best or most engaged students, but instead have developed
a sense of commitment and responsibility to the institution over many years of involvement.

Surprisingly, I found that Development Officers knew almost nothing about their
respective donors’ student experiences. Rather, I found that the Development Officers in my study
overemphasized the importance of alumni engagement in donors’ giving decisions, but they did
not recognize which factors engaged their respective donors. This provided evidence that
fundraising success is impacted by other areas of the institution. For example, Gaier (2005) found
that the relationship between alumni involvement and satisfaction with the academic system as an
undergraduate was significant. He suggests that university officials need to implement practices
that will lead to satisfaction with the academic system in order to increase the likelihood of future
alumni involvement.

Cascione (2003) also found that alumni who participated in at least one formal student
activity during their undergraduate experience were 87% more likely to give and 154% as likely
to engage with the institution, compared to those alumni who did not participate in any student
activities as undergraduates. Mann (2007) found that students who were actively involved during
their studies, such as being a member of an athletic team or Greek organization, may develop a
strong bond to the college and therefore have a greater propensity to make a donation in the future.
My study revealed that formal extracurricular activities were not a main factor in determining
donors’ engagement as students. Rather, they were most engaged by non-academic experiences
(i.e. internships). This slightly deviates from the traditional literature examining student
engagement as a function of participation in formal school-sponsored activities.


**Prestige, Signaling Wealth, and Social Status**

My study found that prestige can be a factor that motivates donors to make major named gifts of physical spaces. This is consistent with the existing body of literature. Prestige is a critical factor in major gift considerations (Cook, 1997). Harbaugh (1998b) refers to “prestige” as the utility that comes from having the amount of a donation publicly known. Harbaugh (1998a) considers the prestige benefit as a motivation for charitable contributions. His study found that donors have a taste for prestige and that a substantial portion of donations can be attributed to it.

The existing literature also explores the culture of elite groups and social circles and their philanthropy. A theme that emerged throughout Ostrower’s (1995) interviews with wealthy donors is that philanthropy clearly remains a sign of prestige among the elite. Philanthropy is a mark of privilege and high social status. Returns to the donor come from fellow members of the elite, who reward him or her for conformity to the norms of the group (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 37). Prince and File (1994) identified these elite donors seeking social approval as “Socialites.” These donors express a desire to be constructively philanthropic and are attracted to a particular social milieu which serves as their philanthropic platform (pg. 57). The donors in my study did not indicate that they were members of elite groups or social circles. It’s important to note that the gifts given by donors in my study were relatively small compared to those given by members of the elite class. Therefore, the results of my study may have supported the existing literature on elite philanthropy if the donor subjects gave larger gifts.

While the donors in my study did not seem to be motivated by a financial or social elite culture, they were motivated by the opinions of their fellow alumni. George Bernard Shaw (1896) argued that, “…a millionaire does not really care whether his money does good or not, provided he finds his conscience eased and his social status improved by giving it away…” Major
philanthropic giving is a cornerstone of elite culture in the United States, and a mechanism for improving one’s social status. Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that “charitable contributions could be viewed as ‘payments’ in exchange for intangible personal rewards of self-esteem or group membership” (pg. 534). Hollander (1990) found that donors give in order to obtain valued social approval from their peers, and the amount of social approval that they receive is based on the size of their contribution compared to the size of the gifts given by their peers.

Some donors in my study also expressed a desire to signal their wealth and success through their philanthropy. This is also consistent with the existing research which finds that philanthropy allows individuals to signal their success and affluence to their peers. Blau (1964) advances the idea of philanthropy as social exchange and proposes that while the gift passes from donor to recipient, the rewards are bestowed upon the donor not so much by the recipient as by the donor’s peers who provide social approval. My findings support the existing literature on the role of signaling wealth in motivating philanthropy. I found that the donors in my study sought social recognition through their gifts because they wanted other alumni to view them as successful and/or generous.

Drennan (2012) found that some donors aggressively bargained for recognition for their philanthropic gifts. The Development Officers in my study were asked if their respective donors negotiated for any terms beyond the naming of the selected physical structures. All Development Officers and donors responded that no additional negotiations took place. Therefore, I did not find support for Drennan’s (2012) findings. It’s important to note that I found some evidence to suggest that donors tried to conceal their prestige/signaling wealth/social status motivations from others. For this reason, they may not have bargained for additional recognition which they truly wanted.
**Legacy**

Most research on legacy giving is exclusively focused on bequests (Wasley, 2009; Panas, 1984). Since all subjects in my study made their respective gifts during their lifetimes, my findings cannot be compared to the findings from these bequest-focused studies. However, one study by Prince and File (1994) found that some major gift donors often give during their lifetimes to create a legacy that will have an impact that lasts beyond their lifetimes. They characterized these donors as “Dynasts,” and found that they give because it’s a family tradition. In my study, “legacy” was one of the least commonly referenced motivations for giving, but all of the donors who gave to create a legacy specifically referenced their families when describing the legacy motivation. In this aspect only, my findings support those from Prince and File (1994). However, the group that they classify as “Dynasts” are characterized by other factors that were not present in my study. For example, Prince and File (1994) found that Dynasts are likely to consult professional advisors when making their giving decisions. As previously discussed, the donors in my study did not consult professional advisors.

**Solicitation Processes**

The existing literature on fundraising contains numerous opinions on the number and type of stages in the solicitation process. Prather (1981) included five steps in the solicitation process: identification, cultivation, planning the approach, solicitation, and follow-up. Dailey (1986) identified seven steps in the major gifts process: a) prospect research, b) research and qualification, c) strategizing the approach, d) involving the prospect, e) making “the ask,” f) closing the solicitation, and g) after-solicitation follow-up. Wood (1989) offered a four-step fundraising process of: a) research, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) recognition. He described the major gifts process as 25% research, 60% cultivation, 5% solicitation, and 10% recognition. Steele and
Elder (1992) presented a five-step development cycle: a) identification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, d) stewardship, and e) re-solicitation (Cook, 1997). All of these studies advocate for similar steps in the optimal solicitation process—they just categorize them differently. For example, “strategizing the approach,” “involving the prospect,” (Dailey, 1986) and “planning the approach” (Prather, 1981) are incorporated in what Steele and Elder (1992) and Wood (1989) refer to as “cultivation.” My study identified four distinct steps in the solicitation processes: a) qualification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) stewardship. This is most consistent with the research of Steele and Elder (1992) and Wood (1989).

The literature on solicitation processes considers the qualification stage to include efforts by the Development Officer to determine Donor’s inclination and/or capacity for giving to the organization. One way to qualify donors’ capacity and inclination for major giving is to look at their past giving behavior. Panas (1984) stated, “Annual giving and major giving programs are complementary because major gift donors almost always have a history of making annual gifts to the institution before and after their major gift” (pg. 52). In my study, all donor subjects had a history of making smaller annual gifts to the case study institution before their major named gifts, thus providing support for Panas’ (1984) finding.

The cultivation stage included any themes related to: a) actions leading up to gift solicitation, and b) relationship-building between Donor and Development Officer/Organization. My study revealed that the Development Officers were almost exclusively responsible for relationship-building with their respective donors. Barascout (2012) stated that Development Officers must cultivate strong relationships with potential donors and alumni while promoting the institution through the benefits that derive from its mission. Other literature (Burk, 2003; King, 2005) also find the role of Development Officers to be essential to the cultivation stage of the
solicitation process. This supports my finding that a strong relationship between Development Officers and respective donors may positively impact donors’ giving decisions. Without exception, all Development Officer-Donor pairings in my study stated that they had a strong bond with the other.

Cook and Lasher (1996) indicate “the pattern of behavior which colleges and universities try to encourage is to move donors from one level to the next in terms of the size of their gifts and the extent of their involvement in and commitment to the organization/institution” (pg. 42). These researchers agree with my finding that donors move from the cultivation phase to the solicitation phase because of the relationship-building efforts of Development Officers.

The solicitation stage included: a) “the ask,” and b) factors related to Donor’s decision in response to “the ask.” As Van Slyke and Brooks (2005) point out, organizations need to be able to translate the relationships built during the cultivation stage into a gift. Existing literature stresses that Development Officers must understand their respective donors’ motivations for giving in order to successfully secure major gifts from these donors (King, 2005; Barascout, 2012; Van Slyke and Brooks, 2005; Burk, 2003). However, I was surprised to find that the Development Officers in my study did not understand the motivations of their respective donors, nor did they understand those donors’ reasons for making their giving decisions. For example, almost all of the Development Officers in my study were unable to provide any information about their donors’ student experiences. However, as discussed in the Research Question 1 Findings section, donors’ experiences as students had a significant impact on their motivations for giving. Additionally, Development Officers were not aware of the existing relationships between donors and faculty/staff members, nor did they understand how strongly these relationships influenced their donors’ giving decisions. It is important to note, however, that the donors in my study committed
to making major gifts to the case study institution, even though it was evident that their Development Officers did not know the factors that motivated their giving. In the section on Research Question 2 Findings, I explain that it is likely that these donors were capable of giving larger gifts, and may have done so if their respective Development Officers understood their motivations.

“The ask” is a major focus of the existing research on fundraising (Van Slyke and Brooks, 2005; Panas, 2009; Burk, 2013). In terms of understanding donor behavior, Van Slyke and Brooks (2005) claim that there are “triggers,” usually in the form of a formal ask, that prompt philanthropic gifts. These triggers are defined as the external activities by organizations that translate the motivations of donors into desired philanthropic behavior. Several other experienced researchers have stressed the importance of “the ask,” citing it as one of the most influential factors in giving decisions (Ciconte and Jacob, 2009; Burk, 2013; Burk, 2003; Panas, 2009). Conversely, King (2005) identified a “no ask” theme from five of his sixteen research subjects. In each of the five cases, the donor subject stated that “the ask” was of essentially no consequence or had no bearing on their giving. In fact, they stated that they made their gift because there was no ask- rather, their gift was a natural outgrowth or progression of their relationship with and of their involvement in the institution (King, 2005). Barascout (2012) also concluded that a formal “ask” did not play an important role in soliciting major donors in his study. There is no other research to support these findings about a “no ask” theme. My study found support for the importance of “the ask.” Similar to the findings of Cook (1997), I found that donors expected “the ask” and responded to it positively. In most cases they had already made determinations about how they planned to respond to the formal solicitation.
In my study, most of the Development Officers solicited their respective donors by providing them with a “menu” of giving options and allowing them to choose their gift amount and purpose. This almost always resulted in the donors choosing the minimum amount required to receiving naming rights. This is supported by the findings of Harbaugh (1998a; 1998b) which studied the influence of donor recognition through public listing of donations by dollar ranges. He concluded that donors would likely give the minimum amount within each gift range. However, the donors in my study did not choose to give the minimum amounts required to receive just any form of recognition. Rather, they gave the minimum amount required to name physical structures. This provides evidence that the availability of naming opportunities may positively affect donors’ giving decisions. Some literature suggests that the best fundraising practice is for Development Officers to solicit their donors for a specific amount of money (Panas, 2009; Ciconte and Jacob, 2009). I also found evidence that donors may give more than they initially intended if asked to do so by their respective solicitors.

Cook (1997) found that securing each gift of $100,000 or more required an average of seven to nine face-to-face visits with the donor over a two-year period (pg. 8). The Development Officers in my study worked with their respective donors for an average of two years before the donors made their major named gifts, which is consistent with Cook’s (1997) conclusion. Since all of the donors in my study were already making annual gifts to the case study institution before meeting their respective Development Officers for the first time, the two-year average timeframe refers to the time it took Development Officers to upgrade their respective donors from annual contributors to major gift donors. Presumably, the process would take longer if the donor subjects had not been giving to the case study institution before being approached by their respective Development Officers.
Lastly, the stewardship stage included any themes related to: a) actions after the gift commitment was made, and b) efforts to make Donor feel recognized/appreciated for their gift. I found that all donors only responded to the informal, personalized stewardship efforts provided by their respective Development Officers. Burk (2003) also stressed the importance of personalized stewardship in her research as well.

**Institutional Partners**

There is a small amount of literature that addresses the role of institutional partners in donors’ giving decisions. Most of the research is non-specific. Ostrower’s (1995) study of wealthy donors revealed that many of the largest gifts from these donors went to organizations where the donor had a relationship with another person who was connected to that organization (Ostrower, 1995, pg. 31). King (2005) found that donor subjects in his study consistently spoke of personal relationships that were either an important element of their relationship with the institution, or in their giving to the institution (pg. 112). He found these relationships to be catalysts for their gifts. I found that institutional partners were generally very important to the donors in my study, but that their respective Development Officers were unaware of the role that the institutional partners played in motivating donors’ gifts.

The existing literature on major gift donors focuses on an organization’s President/CEO as the most important non-fundraising institutional partners. These relationships are considered to be a significant determinant of major donors’ philanthropic behavior (King, 2005; Burlingame and Hodge, 1997). Of the major gift donors interviewed by Panas (1984), the ones who gave gifts of a million dollars or more gave those gifts to institutions and organizations where there was an “unbreakable bond of regard and respect between the donor and the institution’s chief staff person”- there was not one exception (pg. 32-33). The President of the case study institution was
not involved in the solicitation processes for any of the donors in my study. Therefore, my findings do not support the current literature.

My study did find that Development Officers were the institutional partners who were most involved in the solicitation processes. The existing research concludes that Development Officers are essential to the solicitation process (Burk, 2013; Strickland, 2007). They also find that it is important for Development Officers to cultivate strong relationships with donors. In my study, the Development Officers were always the main or only institutional contacts for their respective donors. I also found this to be true because all donors in my study stated that they had a strong relationship with their respective Development Officers. I found that while a Development Officer may serve as a donor’s main or only contact person at an institution that they may never achieve the same level of influence over donors’ giving decisions as non-fundraising institutional partners.

All of the Development Officers in my study conducted the solicitations of their respective major gift donors, even though this contradicted the recommendations from existing research. Panas (1984; 2009) stressed the importance of having the “right” person make contact and ask for a gift. Ostrower (1995), Burk (2003; 2013), and Panas (2009) found solicitations to be most effective when a donor is asked to give by a volunteer and/or one of their peers. For this reason, it was surprising that no volunteers or Board members were engaged in the solicitation processes of the donors in my study.

The existing literature does not delve into the role of institutional partners beyond Presidents, Development Officers, and volunteers. However, my study found that there were three additional types of institutional partners who impacted donors giving decisions: a) School Deans, b) Athletic Coaches, and c) Current Students. I found that, in all cases, the involvement of one or more of these partners positively influenced donors’ giving decisions. The donors seemed to enjoy
being connected with non-fundraising institutional partners, even informally, and these relationships positively impacted their gifts. Surprisingly, most Development Officers seemed unaware that their respective donors kept in touch with faculty/staff members during the solicitation processes, and did not realize the impact of these partners on donors’ giving decisions.

**Incidents and Milestones**

According to the existing literature, one of the main events that influences alumni giving is class reunions. Researchers have found that the average dollar size increases with reunion years (Gaier, 2005). Gunsalus (2004) and Gaier (2005) found statistically significant increases in alumni giving in the 25th and 50th milestone reunion years. I found no evidence in my study to support these findings. No donors in my study mentioned class reunions during their interviews. It is important to note that the case study institution did not emphasize class reunions, and stated that their reunions have low alumni attendance.

One of the main findings of my study was that guest lecturing of current students had a very positive impact on donors’ giving decisions. Donors felt important and connected to the school when they were asked to serve as guest lecturers. This is not mentioned in any existing literature.

I also found that donors responded positively to organized fundraising campaigns. These specific fundraising campaigns may positively impact the following giving decisions: a) when to give, b) how much to give, and/or c) to which purpose to give. This is supported by existing literature about the impact of fundraising campaigns (Burk, 2003; Ciconte and Jacob, 2009).

My study explored donors’ decisions about whether or not to involve their spouse in their giving decisions. I found that the donors in my study chose to only minimally involve their spouses in their solicitation processes. The alumnus/a of the institution acted as the “decider,” and did not
include their spouses. Also, Development Officers did not involve donors’ spouses in the solicitation process. This conflicts with Panas’ (1984) research, which found that for donors who are married, the key person involved is almost always the donors’ spouse. He suggested that the role of the donor’s spouse must be considered when assessing a donor’s potential. He found that husbands and wives give major gifts in partnership. He stated, “A thoughtful donor will certainly wish to talk to his or her spouse about the gift.”

Panas (1984) also found that donors will consult with an attorney or accountant if they’re considering making a gift of “major proportions.” The donors in my study did not consult professional advisors when making their giving decisions, which contradicts Panas’ study. It is important to note that the major gifts in my study may not be considered gifts of “major proportions,” as referenced by Panas (1984, pg. 125).

**Implications for Practice**

**Implications for Researchers**

Throughout my study, I gained valuable knowledge about conducting philanthropy research, which may be useful to other researchers. First, I found that the biggest obstacle was securing access to the specified donor population. I approached several universities before one committed to serving as my case study institution. In addition to the case study institution, two other universities agreed that they would participate. However, the contacts at those institutions both became unresponsive, and later claimed that they did not have the time to participate in my study.

When approaching universities, I focused on highlighting the ways that my study could benefit that institution. The main benefit my research would provide to a potential case study institution was the access to my findings about their donors. As discussed in the Methodology
chapter, donor participants could allow their transcripts to be shared with the case study institution, which would provide the institution with in-depth knowledge about their largest donors. I found that universities with well-established, successful fundraising programs were not moved by the potential benefit to their institutions. However, the three universities that initially agreed to participate in my study all expressed that they recognized the value that my results could add to their fundraising operations. These institutions all had younger fundraising operations than the institutions who immediately elected not to participate in my research.

Second, I found that it was necessary to have a detailed interview instrument for both donors and Development Officers, even though my study was designed to only include semi-structured interviews. While it was helpful to have guiding, open-ended questions, I obtained the most useful data from the more detailed sub-questions in the donor and Development Officer interview instruments. By asking targeted questions, I was able to obtain valuable information that wasn’t otherwise revealed.

**Implications for Institutions**

One of the most important things that was revealed by my study was the importance of the Development Officer-Donor relationship. In all cases, the Development Officers in my study were the main (and sometimes only) connection that their respective donors had at the case study institution. The Development Officers built relationships with their respective donors over an average of two years before they were able to secure major gift commitments from them. However, Development Officers stay in their positions for an average of sixteen months before leaving (Burk, 2013). Burk (2013) also found that it costs a nonprofit organization $127,650 to lose and replace a Development Officer. For these reasons, I recommend that higher education institutions focus on reducing turnover in Development Officer positions, as it jeopardizes relationships with
The main reasons that fundraisers leave their jobs in a short time are: a) they can receive a better salary elsewhere, and/or b) they are overburdened with the work (Burk, 2013). I recommend that higher education institutions take the necessary steps to competitively compensate their fundraisers, promote internal talent, and reduce fundraisers’ workloads to manageable levels.

My study revealed that donors’ student experiences had significant influence over their future giving decisions. This means that some of the factors that motivate the giving decisions of alumni are determined while they are students. As discussed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter, appreciation, affinity, and engagement were three of the top five motivations for the donors in my study making their major named gifts. The student experiences of these donors had a significant impact on these three motivations. Therefore, higher education institutions should recognize the connection between the student experience and future alumni giving. Gaier (2005) also found that the relationship between alumni involvement and satisfaction with the academic system as an undergraduate was significant. He suggests that university officials need to implement practices that will lead to satisfaction with the academic system in order to increase the likelihood of future alumni involvement. Donors in my study cited academics, tutoring, internships, sports/activities, and faculty mentoring as some of the student experiences that positively influenced their giving decisions. I recommend that institutions of higher education expand and improve the quality of these programs. Then they can look to the alumni who participated as students for financial support.

Another common theme of my study was that donors’ philanthropic decisions and motivations were often a result of their professional and/or personal successes. Nearly all of the donors in my study felt that there was some connection between their successes and the education/experiences they received at the case study institution. It was also clear that donors’
economic motivations were influenced by their financial success. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to prepare their students to be successful after they graduate. As discussed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter, appreciation was, by far, the most commonly referenced motivation for donors’ gifts. The most common theme within the appreciation motivation was that the donors expressed gratitude for their professional readiness and success resulting from their education/experiences at the case study institution. Several donors also stated that someone from the case study institution helped them to get a job after they graduated. Therefore, I recommend that higher education institutions implement and/or improve the quality of existing programs and services focused on career-readiness and placement. By helping graduates to get jobs and be successful throughout their careers, schools may increase the likelihood of these alumni making major gifts to their alma mater.

As discussed in the previous chapter, alumni events and guest lecturing opportunities had an impact on the giving decisions of most of the donors in my study. The donors in my study talked about how they became engaged with the case study institution through school-sponsored alumni events near their homes. Some of these donors hadn’t been involved at all with their alma mater since they graduated, so the alumni events served as a way for them to easily re-engaged with the school. They also enjoyed meeting and networking with fellow alumni at these events. When talking about their motivations for giving, several donors mentioned that they sought to signal their wealth and success to and/or be accepted by some alumni who they had met through these events. Therefore, I recommend that institutions of higher education strategically hold school-sponsored alumni events in areas where they have wealthy and/or successful alumni. They may also find a way to facilitate professional networking during these events to increase the connections between alumni. Some of these alumni also engaged with the case study institution when they were asked
to come to the campus to give guest lectures to students. In all cases, guest lecturing positively influenced donors’ giving decisions. Therefore, I recommend that higher education institutions invite their successful and/or wealthy alumni and donor prospects to the school to serve as a guest lecturers for current students.

**Implications for Development Officers**

My study identified four stages of the solicitation process in which both Development Officers and donors were involved: a) qualification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) stewardship. Therefore, I am providing recommendations for Development Officers for each stage of the solicitation process.

**Qualification**

The relationship-building process begins with the first contact between Development Officers and potential donors. However, the qualification phase of the solicitation process can begin before the first contact.

Development Officers can utilize the results of my study to help them prioritize donor prospects who may be most likely to make major named gifts. As discussed in the previous section, student experiences often impact donors’ giving decisions. Unfortunately, Development Officers have no control or influence over donors’ experiences as students. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers prioritize prospects based on factors related to their student experiences. Some examples of these factors include: participating in sports, receiving scholarships, and/or participating in internships. If Development Officers filter their potential donors to identify the ones who met one or more of these criteria, they may have more success raising funds from these alumni.
There are other ways that Development Officers may identify likely donor prospects. For example, my study found that having access to matching gifts positively influenced donors’ giving decisions. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers obtain accurate employer information for their prospects so that they may identify the prospects who work for companies that offer matching gifts. If they are able to secure gifts from these donors, they will also receive the funds from donors’ companies, which increases overall fundraising results.

My study also found that several donors maintained relationships with faculty and/or staff members of the case study institution even after they graduated. Development Officers were almost always unaware of these relationships. The donors with relationships to faculty/staff members cited them as positive influencers of their giving decisions. Several donors even stated that a faculty/staff member was the main reason that they made their respective major named gifts. For these reasons, I recommend that Development Officers consult with faculty/staff members when prioritizing and qualifying prospects because the faculty/staff may be able to provide advice and recommendations about how to secure funds from those donors. The faculty/staff members may also be able to introduce the Development Officers to prospective donors.

When Development Officers actually connect with their prospective donors, they must focus on qualifying the prospects’ capacity and inclination to give to the organization. Prospects’ capacity to give is influenced by economic factors. My study found that these economic motivations influence donors’ decisions about whether or not to give, how much to give, when to give, and how to give. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers seek to discover information about prospects’ financial statuses, individual/family expenses, giving to other charities, and tax statuses. When qualifying prospects’ inclination to give to the organization, I recommend that Development Officers seek to gauge their prospects’ affinity for their
organization. As discussed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter, affinity is the second most commonly referenced motivation for giving, and all donors had a general affinity for the case study institution. By learning about prospects’ feelings and connections toward the organization, Development Officers can determine how inclined the prospects may be to give.

**Cultivation**

The cultivation phase involves relationship-building between donors and the case study institution, as well as relationship-building between donors and their respective Development Officers. I found that these processes took place simultaneously and were equally important. In all cases, I found that the relationship between donors and their respective Development Officers were strong, and positively impacted donors’ giving decisions. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers seek to build strong relationships with their donors. One way that I recommend Development Officers do this is by learning personal information about their donors, and then demonstrating this knowledge to the donors. Examples of personal information include: names/ages of children, career paths of donor/spouse, and information about donors’ childhoods. In my study, donors expressed that they felt close to their respective Development Officers, and appreciated that the Development Officers knew about them and their families. Many donors also appreciated that their Development Officers gave them special treatment. The donors who are motivated by recognition want to be treated as important by their Development Officers. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers make their donors feel special. This can be achieved simply by using language that makes donors feel important, or by providing donors with exclusive opportunities (such as invite-only events).

My study revealed the importance of institutional partners to donors, as well as the fact that Development Officers seemed unaware of the impact of institutional partners. Donors in my study
seemed to enjoy being connected with non-fundraising institutional partners, even informally, and these relationships positively impacted their giving decisions. The main non-fundraising institutional partners were School Deans, Athletic Coaches, and Current Students. Donors also felt positively about meeting these institutional partners during visits to campus. My study found that even though Development Officers were donors’ main (and sometimes only) contact at the case study institution, they couldn’t achieve the same level of influence over donors as institutional partners could. For these reasons, I recommend that Development Officers utilize institutional partners in the solicitation processes of their donors. At a minimum, Development Officers should arrange for their donors to meet one or more of the main institutional partners while they are visiting the school. Donors enjoy meeting the potential beneficiaries of their gifts, so Development Officers should find ways to involve students in the solicitation processes. In addition to meeting students, Development Officers can also facilitate communication between donors and students.

During the cultivation stage, Development Officers should focus on identifying the factors that will influence their donors’ giving decisions. I recommend that Development Officers use the twelve motivations identified through my study as a guideline. During the cultivation phase, Development Officers should learn as much as they can about the factors motivating their donors’ philanthropy by asking thoughtful and strategic questions. For example, Development Officers need to learn about donors’ experiences while they were students at the school since my study found that student experiences had an impact on several motivations. Development Officers should also work on providing donors with additional motivations for giving. For example, my study found that all donors wanted to make an impact with their philanthropy. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers learn what type of impact their donors want to have, and then work to
impress upon their donors that they can achieve that type of impact on the organization’s beneficiaries.

**Solicitation**

As discussed in the cultivation phase, Development Officers should focus on identifying and increasing donors’ philanthropic motivations. Development Officers must choose the optimal time to conduct the solicitations of their respective donors, specifically for solicitations of major named gifts. My study found that it takes Development Officers an average of two years to upgrade their annual donors to major gift donors. Based on my findings, I recommend that Development Officers wait to conduct these solicitations until they are confident that their donors possess at least nine of the twelve motivations identified by my study. As discussed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter, all donors in my study referenced the following motivations: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, and g) Opportunity Cost. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers work to understand and build upon these motivations before soliciting their donors for major named gifts.

My study found that donors may give more if their respective Development Officers understand their motivations. While these are not their main motivations, my study found that donors will consider between two and four of the following factors, in addition to the seven motivations previously discussed, in their giving decisions: a) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, b) Warm Glow, c) Legacy, d) Obligation, e) Tax Implications. Development Officers should be aware of these motivations because it will help them to tailor their “asks” to each individual donor. “Asks” are similar to sales pitches. Since not all donors possess all of these motivations for giving, I recommend that Development Officers use their understandings of these motivators to personalize their asks and, therefore, make it more likely that they will be successful.
When Development Officers are soliciting major gifts, they should consider that my study found naming opportunities to be an effective motivator for giving. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers offer formal recognition in exchange for donors’ major gifts, if possible.

As discussed in the Relationship to the Literature section of this chapter, researchers have spent time trying to determine who should be involved in solicitations of donors. As noted throughout this chapter, institutional partners may have strong relationships with donors, even if Development Officers are unaware of these connections. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers strategically leverage relationships between institutional partners and donors in order to raise more money. It may be more effective for institutional partners, in conjunction with Development Officers, to solicit these donors.

“The ask” is the climax of the solicitation process because Development Officers find out if their efforts have been successful. In my study, some Development Officers provided their respective donors with “menus” of giving options, and allowed the donors to choose the amount and purpose of their gifts. Other Development Officers asked their donors for a specific amount of money for a specific purpose, which resulted in the donors making larger gifts than the donors who chose their gift amounts from a “menu” of options. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers do not use “menus” of giving options when soliciting donors. Rather, they should ask for a specific amount.

I also found that donors in my study made their giving decisions in one of two ways: a) chose amount of money they would give before deciding on the purpose of their gifts, or b) chose the impact they wanted their gifts to have before deciding on the amount of money to give. The donors who chose impact before money gave more than the donors who chose money before impact. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers focus their solicitations on the impact
of donors’ gifts before discussing dollar amounts. If Development Officers choose to use “menus” of giving options in their solicitations, I recommend that they do not include dollar amounts on the menu. This will cause donors to pick their gifts based on impact over money.

**Stewardship**

Stewardship is an important step in the solicitation process. The Development Officers in my study were not involved with the formal stewardship processes, as this was managed by a different team in the University Advancement division. My study found that formal stewardship did not seem to be meaningful to donors. However, the Development Officers in my study stewarded their donors informally and separately from the formal stewardship efforts. The informal stewardship was personalized for each donor. The donors expressed that this type of stewardship was meaningful to them and made them feel appreciated for their major named gifts. Therefore, I recommend that Development Officers provide their donors with informal, personalized stewardship. Examples include: handwritten thank you notes, articles about things of particular interest to the donors, and complimentary tickets to events. My study found that even if donors didn’t accept complimentary tickets to events and/or free merchandise, the offers still made them feel appreciated. Stewardship is important because a donor will only make additional gifts to the organization if they felt well-treated and appreciated for their first gift. Development Officers may be more successful at turning their major named gift donors into lifetime repeat donors if they effectively steward those donors in the way that I’ve recommended.
Limitations

The anticipated limitations and design issues of my study were discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3. However, three additional limitations were identified during and after conducting the study: a) small sample size, b) homogenous donor participants, and c) time elapsed between gifts and interviews.

The sample size turned out to be smaller than expected. During initial conversations with the case study institution, they estimated a larger population size of approximately 25-30 donors. However, the exhaustive list of donors meeting my study’s criteria only included thirteen donors. I was initially told that I could expect to be allowed to contact twelve or thirteen of these donors upon confirmation from the respective Development Officers. However, I was later told that three of the potential donor subjects could not be contacted. Therefore, my prospective sample was reduced to only ten possible donor subjects. While this sample size was smaller than expected, there are benefits to maintaining a small sample. Robinson (2014) stated, “this sample size provides scope for developing cross-case generalities, while preventing the researcher from being bogged down in data, and permitting individuals in the sample to be given a defined identity, rather than being subsumed into an anonymous part of a larger whole.”

While the sample size was smaller than initially anticipated, it was also more homogenous than I had expected. The sample was relatively homogenous in terms of demographics and philanthropy. This was not my original intention, but it allowed my study to remain contextualized within a defined setting. Having a heterogenous sample could have been challenging because it could lessen the likelihood of meaningful core themes being found during my analysis (Robinson, 2014).
Subjects were not asked to disclose demographic factors beyond gender and marital status, as those were required for the study. Six of the seven donors were male, and one was female. Six donors identified themselves as “married,” while the remaining donor identified as “single/never married.”

The gifts of the seven donor subjects were also relatively homogenous. All seven gift amounts were between $25,000 and $100,000. Three gifts were for $25,000, two gifts were for $50,000, and two gifts were for $100,000. All gift commitments were paid over multiple years, and were paid in full prior to the interview date. One donor paid over two years, three donors paid over three years, and three donors paid over five years.

Lastly, my study was limited by the fact that the gift commitments being studied were made between three and ten years before the donors’ interview dates. However, all donor subjects demonstrated a thorough recollection of their respective solicitation processes and giving decisions. All except one Development Officer were able to recall the solicitation processes, as well. This was surprising since Leedy and Ormrod (2010) warned that, “people’s memories are subject to considerable distortion and are apt to recall what might or should have happened, based on their attitudes or beliefs, rather than what actually did happen” (pg. 148).”

**Recommendations for Future Research**

My study was intended to provide a foundation of knowledge relating to the major gifts of alumni to name physical structures as higher education institutions. In 2016, 40% of the total contributions to higher education educations were made for the purpose of capital expenditures (Council for Aid to Education, 2017). However, there is currently no specific research on the population of donors who make these donations. Therefore, my first recommendation is that my research be continued on a larger sample size. It should be expanded to additional higher education
institutions, which in turn would increase the number of donors and gifts being studied. Increasing the sample size would expand the generalizability of the results.

Increasing the sample size would provide opportunities for additional analyses. The results could be filtered and analyzed so conclusions could be drawn based on demographic, institutional, and/or giving factors. For example, the data could be analyzed by gender, age, public/private institution, geographic area, etc. I would specifically recommend analyzing data based on giving factors, such as: amount of gift, purpose of gift, etc. For example, conclusions could be drawn based on the motivations and solicitation processes of donors giving under $100K compared to those giving over $100K.

While further research could explore additional samples within the existing population, it could also be expanded to other populations. The sample in my study was drawn from a very narrow population. Donor subjects had to be living individual alumni of the case study institution who made at least one major gift, during their lifetime, to name a physical structure. This study was designed to be repeatable to a broader population and other samples within that population. I recommend that my study be applied to these other populations. The results can be utilized to further understand major named gifts, and can also be used for comparative purposes to understand the differences between populations. Minor changes to the interview instruments would be required in all cases discussed.

First, alumni are not the only donors who make major named gifts to institutions of higher education. Examples of these donors include: family members of alumni, individual supporters of the community/work of the institution, or businesses/corporations. On average, about half of the donors to colleges and universities are alumni of those institutions. However, of the $41 billion donated to higher education institutions in 2016, only 24.2% came from individual alumni.
(Council for Aid to Education, 2017). Since about three-quarters of total funding came from non-alumni sources, it makes sense to study other higher education donors. The motivations for these donors are different from those of alumni donors (Panas, 1984). Since there is no research on these major named gift donors to higher education, it is a relevant topic for further research.

Second, not all major gifts are made for the purpose of naming physical structures. There are a wide variety of gift purposes from which donors can choose. Donors have the option to make named gifts for intangible items, such as scholarships or endowment funds. They can also make major gifts that do not include a naming component. One population within this group that I recommend studying is those donors who make anonymous major gifts. Since 1913, there has been an increasing trend of anonymous giving to charitable organizations. Sharpe (2009) stated, “Understanding the various possible motivations behind both anonymous and private giving can help those responsible for fund development accommodate what appears to be an increasingly important segment of donors.” This is a phenomenon that has been studied, but it is still a growing field of interest. It would be interesting to compare the motivations and solicitation processes of these populations.

Lastly, higher education institutions are not the only charitable organizations which offer naming opportunities for physical structures. Hospitals, museums, and other nonprofit organizations can all receive gifts and award naming rights. My study could be applied to these organizations and then the results could be compared by organization type.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I focused on addressing my research questions and sub-questions. My first research question sought to understand donors’ motivations for giving. Ultimately, I found twelve main overarching motivations that influenced alumni donors who named physical structures with
their major gifts. These donors considered nine to eleven of these twelve main motivations in their giving decisions. There were seven motivations that all donors in my study referenced: a) Appreciation, b) Affinity, c) Financial Considerations, d) Making an Impact, e) Engagement, f) Recognition, and g) Opportunity Cost. Additionally, they all considered between two and four of the following five factors: a) Prestige/Signaling Wealth/Social Status, b) Warm Glow, c) Legacy, d) Obligation, e) Tax Implications.

My second research question sought to understand the impact of the solicitation processes on the giving decisions of alumni donors who named physical structures with their major named gifts. I found that four phases of the solicitation processes influenced these donors’ giving decisions: a) qualification, b) cultivation, c) solicitation, and d) stewardship. My study identified four institutional partners who were involved in the solicitation processes: a) Development Officers, b) School Deans, c) Athletic Coaches, and d) Current Students. While Development Officers were the donors’ main connections to the case study institution, the donors felt more positively about the involvement of the other institutional partners during their solicitation processes.

My study also found that there were two main solicitation process events that this group of donors referenced as contributing factors in their decision-making processes for their respective major named gifts: a) specific fundraising campaigns, and b) formal campus visits. During their solicitation processes, these donors also had to make decisions about if and how to involve the following people: a) spouses, and/or b) professional advisors. Ultimately, I found that the donors in my study acted as the “deciders” regarding their philanthropic gifts, and did not involve their spouses, nor professional advisors.
In my research of the solicitation process, I found that Development Officers possessed significant knowledge of biographical information about their respective donors’. However, they did not seem aware of the factors that their respective donors considered when making their giving decisions.

I did recognize that my research was limited by three unexpected factors which I did not control. First, the sample size was smaller than anticipated. Second, the demographics of the sample were relatively homogeneous. Third, between three and ten years had lapsed since the studied major named gifts were made. However, all donors in the study were easily able to recall the specific details of their gifts and solicitation processes.

Using the Literature Review chapter, I compared my findings to the existing fundraising and philanthropy research. Ultimately, all of my findings were new because they studied a group of donors who have never been specifically studied—alumni donors who name physical structures with major gifts to their alma maters. However, I found consistencies, as well as some differences, between my findings and the existing research on other donor populations.

The findings of my study also offered information for researchers and practitioners. Utilizing these findings, I provided recommendations for researchers, higher education institutions, and Development Officers. First, I shared my experience and challenges conducting philanthropy research so that future researchers can consider those experiences when designing fundraising-related studies. Second, I recommended that higher education institutions make changes to improve students’ experiences, which will later positively impact those students’ giving decisions as alumni donors. For Development Officers, I recommended that they work to understand and inspire their donors’ motivations, using the twelve main overarching motivations identified by my study as a guideline. I also recommended that they involve other institutional
partners in their solicitation processes, and personalize the solicitation processes and “asks” of each of their donors.

My study also provided a foundation for future researchers to build upon. My first recommendation for future research is to increase the study to a larger sample size. Secondly, I recommend studying specific groups within these samples, and comparing findings between groups. Lastly, I recommend expanding my study to different, yet related, donor populations and comparing the findings to the donor population in my study.

It is my hope and intention that my study will provide valuable information for higher education institutions, fundraising practitioners, and philanthropy researchers.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Understanding with Case Study Institution

LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING

Between

[CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]

And

Allison Cherkosly, Ph.D. Candidate

This letter serves to outline the participation of [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] in the doctoral dissertation research study entitled, “Alumni and Named Structures: A Qualitative Analysis of Major Gift Donors” (“Study”). The purpose of this Letter of Understanding is to clearly outline the expectations for both parties. This document is not legally binding, and either party can withdraw from this partnership at any time.

1) [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] has granted permission for Principal Investigator Allison Cherkosly (“PI”) to conduct the Study at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. The PI is conducting the Study under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Gilbert Valverde, Dr. Mitch Leventhal, and Dr. Noah Drezner.

2) [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] will compile a comprehensive list of all donors meeting the specified criteria for inclusion in the Study. Together with the PI, the Parties will decide on the sample to be contacted about participating in the Study. [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] may decline to allow the PI to contact any donor for any reason.

3) The PI will obtain approval from the State University of New York at Albany’s Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) and provide [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] with copies of all IRB-approved communications.

4) [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] will provide the mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address for each contacted donor (excluding those who opted-out) to the PI. The PI will NOT use this contact information for any purpose, other than what is required for the Study. This contact information will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone.
5) The PI will be responsible for following up with each donor in order to secure their commitment to be interviewed for the Study. If the PI is unable to contact a donor, she may request [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]’s assistance.

6) Once the PI secures participation commitments from donors, she will notify [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] of the names and scheduled interview dates for each participant.

7) Designated fundraising staff members (identified by [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]) will be interviewed to provide background information on each donor participant in the Study, only after these donors sign an IRB-approved consent form. The consent form outlines participants’ rights (staff and donors), and the measures in place to ensure their privacy. Each staff member will need to sign an IRB-approved consent form, as well. All interviews will be audio-recorded and professionally transcribed.

8) The PI will provide [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] with the transcripts, notes, and audio-recordings from donor participants who consent to having their interviews shared. The PI will also provide [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] with a copy of the final report of the Study.

9) [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION], staff members, and donors will NOT be identified by name in the Study. A pseudonym will be used for the school. No identifying characteristics or proprietary information of the school, staff, or donors will be referenced in the final report.

10) All information collected for the Study will be kept confidential, unless disclosure is required by law, or by the State University of New York at Albany’s IRB.

_____________________________________          _____________________________________
Vice President Signature                  PI Signature

_____________________________________          _____________________________________
Vice President Printed Name                PI Printed Name

_____________________________________          _____________________________________
Date                                      Date
Appendix B: Donor Letter of Introduction

[DATE]

[DONOR NAME]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE]

Dear [DONOR NAME],

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to Allison Cherkosly, via this letter. Ms. Cherkosly is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the Educational Policy and Leadership Studies program at the University at Albany - State University of New York (SUNY Albany). She is partnering with [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] to conduct research in the field of higher education philanthropy.

[CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] is fortunate to have buildings, schools, rooms, and other physical structures named for some of our most generous benefactors. Ms. Cherkosly’s research seeks to understand the factors and motivators that lead to these types of gifts. Since the [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE] was a result of your generous philanthropic support, I’ve suggested that Ms. Cherkosly contact you about participating in this research project. I strongly encourage you to participate.

Thank you for considering this unique educational opportunity. I know that you will enjoy meeting Ms. Cherkosly. She will follow up with you in approximately one to two weeks. If you do not want your contact information provided to Ms. Cherkosly, please contact me by [DATE] at the phone number or e-mail listed below. Thank you again for your generosity to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION], and Ms. Cherkosly and I thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[PHONE NUMBER]
[E-MAIL ADDRESS]
Appendix C: Donor Interview Reminder E-mail

Dear [NAME],

I’m reaching out to remind you that we have a phone interview scheduled for [TIME] on [DATE] to discuss your philanthropic support of [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. If you are no longer available at this time, please notify me as soon as possible so we may reschedule the interview. You can reach me by responding to this e-mail or call my cell phone at [PHONE NUMBER].

(If Participant hasn’t signed consent form)

Please remember that you will need to sign and return the attached Informed Consent form by [DATE (two days prior to interview)]. Please be aware that if I do not receive the signed consent Form at least one day before our scheduled interview, we will need to reschedule it. You can scan and e-mail the signed form to me at [E-MAIL ADDRESS], or you may mail it to:

[NAME]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE]

[PROVIDE CALL-IN INSTRUCTIONS].

I very much look forward to speaking with you at [TIME] on [DATE]. Please feel free to contact me before then if you have any questions.

Thank you,

[NAME]
[PHONE NUMBER]
[E-MAIL ADDRESS]
Appendix D: Donor Consent Form

DONOR CONSENT FORM

“Alumni and Named Structures: A Qualitative Analysis of Major Gift Donors”

Researcher: Allison Cherkosly
Affiliation: University at Albany-State University of New York, School of Education
Degree: Pursuing Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies

Faculty Advisor: Gilbert Valverde, Ph.D.
Affiliation: University at Albany-State University of New York, School of Education

Description of Research:

This is a study of alumni major gift donors to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] who named physical structures at their alma mater with their philanthropic gifts. The purpose of this research is to understand the motivations and factors that influenced these donors’ decisions to make these gifts. It will also analyze the role of [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] in bringing these gifts to fruition.

Participants in this study have the opportunity to contribute to an important field of study. Philanthropy to colleges and universities has become increasingly important in the wake of decreased government funding and increased costs of higher education. The donors included in this study are some of the most generous contributors to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. Understanding what factors motivated their generosity may help institutions to inspire similar generosity from other individuals. Although you may not receive direct benefit from your participation, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research.

Description of Involvement:

To help gain further insights into this area of higher education philanthropy, you are being asked to participate in one phone interview at a time that is convenient for you. The length of the interview will be based on your availability, but should be scheduled for a minimum of 30 minutes. During the phone interview, you will be asked about the major named gift you made to your alma mater and the factors leading up to it. You will have the opportunity to share information about your relationship with your alma mater and what influenced your gift.

Prior to your interview, I will speak to your [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] Development Officer, [NAME] about your relationship and philanthropic history with the school. The main purpose of this conversation is to obtain background information. Since your time is valuable, I want our time to be spent most efficiently. If you have any concerns about information being obtained from your Development Officer, please discuss these with me, and allow me the opportunity to address your concerns.

We do not anticipate any risk in your participation. However, if an interview question makes you uncomfortable, you do not need to answer it, nor provide a reason for not answering.
Privacy:

Protecting your privacy is our main priority. In the final report, a pseudonym will be used for [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. No names or personally identifiable information of participants will be reported. Identities of participants will be disguised by identifying each of them with an assigned Case Identification number (Case ID) to protect their anonymity.

Anything you say during your interview will be held in the strictest confidence, unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the IRB and University at Albany may inspect these records, if required. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked if you consent to having your interview shared with a designated staff member at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. Your decision about whether or not your interview can be shared will have no bearing on the study. This choice is purely intended to ensure that you are comfortable with your decision to participate.

Contact Information:

We welcome any questions about this study. You also will be provided with a copy of this form.

Researcher:
Allison Cherkosly
[PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL ADDRESS]

Faculty Advisor:
Gilbert Valverde, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies
[PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL ADDRESS]

Your Rights as a Research Participant:

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research or sign the informed consent form, you may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty. I will retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study, unless you request that your data be excluded from any analysis and/or destroyed.

Research involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the University at Albany IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office for Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5469 or hscrconcerns@albany.edu.
**Consent:**

*Your interview will be audio-recorded and professionally transcribed by an independent third-party. Please sign below to indicate that you are willing to have this interview audio-recorded.*

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<tr>
<th>Participant’s Printed Name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Printed Name</td>
<td>Signature</td>
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*I have read the information about this study. I hereby consent to participate in the study.*

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Appendix E: Staff Consent Form

STAFF CONSENT FORM

“Alumni and Named Structures: A Qualitative Analysis of Major Gift Donors”

Researcher: Allison Cherkosly
Affiliation: University at Albany-State University of New York, School of Education
Degree: Ph.D. Candidate in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies

Faculty Advisor: Gilbert Valverde, Ph.D.
Affiliation: University at Albany-State University of New York, School of Education

Description of Research:

This is a study of alumni major gift donors to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] who named physical structures at their alma mater with their philanthropic gifts. The purpose of this research is to understand the motivations and factors that influenced these donors’ decisions to make these gifts. It will also analyze the role of [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] and its fundraising strategies in bringing these gifts to fruition.

Participants in this study have the opportunity to contribute to an important field of study. Philanthropy to colleges and universities has become increasingly important in the wake of decreased government funding and increased costs of higher education. The donors included in this study are some of the most generous contributors to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. Understanding what factors motivated their generosity may help institutions to inspire similar generosity from other individuals. Although you may not receive direct benefit from your participation, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research.

Description of Involvement:

Development staff are being asked to participate in this study to provide background information about selected donors, and the gifts they made to name respective physical structures at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. You will be asked to participate in one phone interview for each donor participant to which you are assigned. The length of the interview(s) may vary, but should be scheduled for a minimum of 15 minutes per donor. Before the phone interview, you will be asked for objective information (amount of gift, date of gift, etc.). During the interview, you will be asked about subjective information about your engagement with these donors, and the factors that influenced these donors to make their gifts to name physical structures at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION].

We do not anticipate any risk in your participation. However, if an interview question makes you uncomfortable, you do not need to answer it, nor provide a reason for not answering.
Privacy:

Protecting your privacy is our main priority. In the final report, a pseudonym will be used for [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. No names or personally identifiable information of participants will be reported.

Anything you say during your interview will be held in confidence, unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may inspect these records, if required. Information you disclose during your interview may be shared with donor participants, unless you specifically state that you do not want something disclosed.

Contact Information:

We welcome any questions about this study. You also will be provided with a copy of this form.

Researcher:
Allison Cherkosly
[PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL ADDRESS]

Faculty Advisor:
Gilbert Valverde, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies
[PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL ADDRESS]

Your Rights as a Research Participant:

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research or sign the informed consent form, you may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty. I will retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study, unless you request that your data be excluded from any analysis and/or destroyed.

Research involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the University at Albany IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office for Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5469 or hsconcerns@albany.edu.
**Consent:**

*Your interview will be audio-recorded and professionally transcribed by an independent third-party. Please sign below to indicate that you are willing to have this interview audio-recorded.*

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Appendix F: Donor Interview Protocol

DONOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Donor Name:

Case ID Number:

Introduction Script:

First, I want to remind you that this interview is being audio-recorded. You were provided with an informed consent form, which you signed on [DATE]. The privacy protection measures were detailed in this form, but I’ll remind you that no personally identifiable information will be used in my final report. The Development Officer at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION], [NAME], will be provided with a copy of your interview and my notes, ONLY if you consent. Do you consent to having this information shared with [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]?

– ANSWER-

Thank you. You may change your mind at any point before my final report is accepted by my dissertation committee.

The objective of my research is to understand the factors and motivations that lead generous donors like yourself to name buildings, schools, centers, and/or rooms at their alma maters. I have a guideline for this interview, but I would like you to feel comfortable sharing all information that you feel is relevant to this topic, even if I don’t specifically ask about it. Please be open, honest, and specific with your responses to help ensure the accuracy of my findings. You do not have to answer any questions or share any information if you are uncomfortable with it.

I will provide you with a copy of your interview transcript within [TIMEFRAME] and given the opportunity to review it. We can discuss any revisions you would like to be made, if necessary.

Do you have any questions before we get started?
Donor Interview Instrument:
(Interview is semi-structured, so the interview will be flexible)

1) Let’s begin with you telling me about your relationship with [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] after you graduated in [GRADUATION YEAR]. I’m interested in understanding how you came to be such a generous supporter, so I’d like to hear about your history with the school.

   a. Were there any people who were key in facilitating your relationship with the school? What was your relationship with them? What was their relationship to the school?

2) Now that I know more about your relationship with [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION], can you share your philanthropic history with the school? You don’t need to worry about telling me exact dates and amounts of your gifts. Instead, I’m interested to hear about why you started, continued, and changed (increased/decreased) your giving to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION].

   a. What factors motivated you to start/continue/change your giving?
   b. How did [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] get you to start/continue/change your giving?
   c. What programs/causes have you given to at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]? Why?
   d. How did [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] show their appreciation for your giving?
   e. What did you hope to achieve and/or get in return for your gifts?
   f. What events/circumstances/people do you feel acted as catalysts for your giving and/or positively impacted your desire to give to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]? What events/circumstances/people do you feel inhibited your giving and/or negatively impacted your desire to give to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]?

3) You generously named the [NAME OF PHYSICAL STRUCTURE]. Please talk me through how this gift came to be, from start to finish.

   a. When did you first hear about this naming opportunity? When did you first start to consider it? Which came first and how much time passed in between?
   b. Were you given other choices for things to support with your contribution? If so, why did you choose this one?
   c. Did you decide how much you were going to give, and then determine what you could support for that amount of money? Or did you determine what you wanted to support first, and then decide how much you would give?
   d. You could’ve made this gift at any time. What made you decide to make the commitment at the time you did?
e. Did [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] ever ask you to make a gift of this size and/or purpose that you previously declined? If so, why did you decline? What made you change your mind?

f. What would you say were the reasons that you made this gift?

g. (If married) What was the nature of your spouse’s involvement in this process? What did your spouse think about making this gift?

h. Did you consult anyone else throughout this process (lawyers, financial advisors, friends, etc.)?

i. Who asked you for this gift? How would you describe your relationship with this person?

j. How did the following factors influence your philanthropy to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] (please elaborate):

   i. Economic considerations (What were they?)
   ii. Connection to the school as a student and/or alumnus/a
   iii. Emotions (feeling good about giving, feeling obligated to give back, etc.)
   iv. [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]’s efforts (fundraising and engagement)
   v. Receiving tangible/intangible benefits (prestige, public recognition, etc.)

4) Please tell me about your relationships with the [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]’s development staff and leadership (President/Cabinet/Deans).

   a. How did these people influence your decision to name [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE]?

5) What made you decide to make this type of gift to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] instead of another nonprofit organization?

   a. Have you made gifts of similar significance (amount/impact/purpose) to other organizations?

6) Is there anything else pertaining to this topic that you feel is important that we haven’t discussed?
Conclusion Script:

[NAME], I am extremely grateful for your participation in this interview. Your responses have provided valuable information and insights that will help me in my research, and other development professionals in higher education.

Please be assured that protecting your privacy remains my highest priority. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

I plan to send you a copy of the interview transcript, via e-mail, within [TIMEFRAME]. Please take the time to review it and contact me if there’s anything you’d like to discuss further.

Are there any questions that I can answer for you before we end this call?

Again, thank you for your participation and generosity!
Appendix G: Staff Interview Protocol

STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Staff Member Name:

Title:

Introduction Script:

First, I want to remind you that this interview is being audio-recorded.

The purpose of this interview is to obtain background information about you and each of the donors that I will be interviewing. I’m also looking to obtain information about [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]’s involvement in securing the gifts that each of the donors gave in order to name physical structures at the school. I have a guideline for this interview, but I would like you to feel comfortable sharing all information that you feel is relevant to this topic, even if I don’t specifically ask about it.

You will be provided with a copy of your interview transcript within [TIMEFRAME] and given the opportunity to review it. We can discuss any revisions you would like to be made, if necessary.

Do you have any questions before we get started?
Staff Interview Instrument:
(Interview is semi-structured, so the interview will be flexible)

Questions that only need to be asked once per staff member:

1) How long have you worked at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]?
   a. How long have you worked in the University Advancement division?
      i. What positions have you held in this division, and for how long?

2) Do you currently, or have you ever staffed (been assigned to) any of the donors being interviewed for this study?

Objective questions that only needs to be answered once by [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]:

1) Staffing/Assignments for each donor subject:
   a. Is this donor currently assigned to a development staff member?
      i. What is the title of the staff member?
   b. What was the title of the staff member who staffed this donor when they made the gift to name [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE]?
      i. How long did this person staff the donor before the gift was made?

2) Information for each donor subject:
   a. What year did they graduate?
   b. What is the current lifetime giving amount for the donor?
   c. How many years has the donor been giving to the school?
   d. What was the amount of the gift that named [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE]?
      i. How long did it take the donor to pay the full amount of the gift?
   e. What was the date that the donor made the commitment to name [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE]?
      f. What were the specifics of the agreement between [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] and the donor about this gift? (provide agreement if available)

Subjective questions for staff member(s):

1) Please provide me with some information about the donor’s relationship with [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION].
   a. What volunteer roles/committees have they served on?
   b. Have they attended events or class reunions?
   c. Do they have relationships with current or former staff/faculty members, university leadership, or other alumni?
2) Can you tell me about this donor’s philanthropic history with the school?
   a. When and why did they start giving?
   b. How did their giving change over the years?
   c. When and why did the school identify this person as a potential major donor?
   d. How did the school get the donor to increase their giving?
   e. Who was involved in the fundraising process with this donor?
   f. Did the donor ever have any objections to giving?
   g. What projects/causes did the donor give to? Why?
   h. Did the donor ever receive any benefits or recognition for their giving? What was it?
      i. Had the donor ever been asked for major gifts before?
         i. If they made the gift, please provide details.
         ii. If they declined to make the gift, what reason did they give?

3) Please talk me through the process, from start to finish, about how the gift that named [PHYSICAL STRUCTURE] came to be.
   a. Who was involved with this process?
      i. Who asked for the gift?
   b. (If married) Was the donor’s spouse involved in the process?
   c. When and how was the naming opportunity presented to the donor?
      i. Why did the school introduce this giving option?
   d. Did any “negotiations” take place between the school and the donor about the amount/timing of the gift, what they would receive in exchange, etc.?
   e. What impact do you think the following factors had on the donor’s decision to make this gift:
      i. Economic considerations (What were they?)
      ii. Connection to the school as a student and/or alumnus/a
      iii. Emotions (feeling good about giving, feeling obligated to give back, etc.)
      iv. Institution’s efforts (fundraising and engagement)
      v. Receiving tangible/intangible benefits (prestige, public recognition, etc.)

4) Is there anything else pertaining to this topic that you feel is important that we haven’t discussed?
Conclusion Script:

[NAME], I am extremely grateful for your participation in this interview. Your responses have provided valuable information and insights that will help me in my research, and other development professionals in higher education.

I plan to send you a copy of the interview transcript, via e-mail, within [TIMEFRAME]. Please take the time to review it and contact me if there’s anything you’d like to discuss further.

Are there any questions that I can answer for you before we end this call?

Again, thank you for your participation and assistance.
Appendix H: Donor Follow-Up

(Handwritten on personal stationary)

Dear [NAME],

Thank you so much for participating in my research project. I thoroughly enjoyed hearing about the experiences that led to your generous philanthropic support to [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION].

Again, thank you for your participation. Both [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION] and I are extremely grateful for your generosity and openness.

Best,

Allison

* May be revised and/or personalized based on interview.
Appendix I: Staff Follow-Up

(Handwritten on personal stationary)

Dear [NAME],

Thank you so much for participating in my research project. I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me about some of your most generous donors at [CASE STUDY INSTITUTION]. Your interview provided valuable information which was helpful during my interview(s) with the donor(s) we discussed.

Again, thank you for your participation and assistance with my research.

Best,

Allison

* May be revised and/or personalized based on interview.
REFERENCES


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“Major Gifts and Naming Opportunities.” Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisory Philanthropy Roadmap.


